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KINDERGARTEN RETENTION: A SURVEY OF EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES AND CURRENT PRACTICE

BY

SUSAN RUSHBROOKE BELL

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(Signed) Susan R. Bell

PERMANENT ADDRESS: 11318 - 64 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5W 4H5

Date: October 7 1985

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Kindergarten Retention: A Survey of Educators' Attitudes and Current Practice" submitted by Susan Rushbrooke Bell in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

Leone Ewart Turner

Supervisor

W Cryderman

Don Murray

Date October 7, 1985

Abstract

This study identified and compared the attitudes toward retention of kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals in a large urban school district in Edmonton, Alberta. The study also 1) discovered the personal experiences of the surveyed teachers with kindergarten retention recommendations and 2) assessed the feelings of teachers and principals about alternatives to kindergarten retention. The survey instrument was a questionnaire.

The attitude survey of the kindergarten teachers revealed a high level of acceptance of many traditional arguments for the use of retention. The teachers almost unanimously supported kindergarten retention for the very young child, the academically unready child, and the socially immature child. The responses of the teachers and the principals were significantly different ($p < .05$) to 14 of the 33 statements in Part A of the questionnaire. The principals were less convinced than the teachers that retention actually promoted learning and they recognized the possibility that retention could harm the child's self-concept. Although the principals supported kindergarten retention, their support

was significantly less than that of the teachers.

Almost all the teachers had recommended kindergarten retention at least once. The teachers considered social and emotional maturity the most important factor in a retention recommendation. A majority of both the teachers and the principals desired alternatives to kindergarten retention. The principals' most frequently mentioned alternative was continuous progress, while the teachers most often cited a readiness class as a desirable alternative.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Every year elementary school teachers agonize over the promotion or retention recommendations that they must make for students in their classes. Many factors about the child, the family, the school and society influence these decisions and fuel an ongoing controversy among educators about the value of current retention practices.

The kindergarten is not exempt from this controversy. Although attendance in Alberta schools is not compulsory until a child has reached the entrance age for grade one, most Alberta children are enrolled in kindergarten in their pre-grade one year. In recent years kindergarten teachers in many school districts have been following the practice of retaining some students, whom they do not consider ready for the grade one program, for a second year in kindergarten. Often kindergarten retention does not follow a strictly defined policy set out by school board administrators.

Instead kindergarten teachers make their retention recommendations in a more isolated situation without criteria comparable to those guiding decisions made in the elementary grades.

Behind each retention recommendation made by a kindergarten teacher is the recognition of the importance of a successful start to the child's school years. These teachers hope another year in kindergarten will enhance the child's academic achievement and total development.

The practice of retention is commonplace in today's elementary schools despite research indicating that retention does not necessarily lead to gains in academic achievements and may even contribute to feelings of worthlessness in some children (Frazier, 1978, p. 1). Teachers' continuing use of retention may be based more on traditional practice than on a thorough understanding of the implications of retention for the child.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Although retention has been a common practice in elementary schools for many decades, there is very little research related to its use at the kindergarten level. The

study will attempt to provide information which may be used by teachers and school administrators in their efforts to evaluate kindergarten retention and examine alternative policies for school beginners. The study will document the attitudes toward retention of teachers and principals in an urban setting, their feelings regarding alternatives, the process of retention recommendations currently being made at the kindergarten level, and teacher satisfaction with current practices. Perhaps the data collected in this survey will lead to a better understanding of the implications of kindergarten retention.

The school district selected for the survey probably presents a pattern of kindergarten retention typical of many Alberta school systems. The Edmonton Public School kindergartens have had a steady rate of retention in those years for which such statistics were available:

School Year	% of Kindergarten Children Retained
1983-84	4.0
1982-83	3.2
1981-82	3.4

Sometimes a variation of kindergarten retention is followed at the request of a child's parents. Parents may feel their child is not ready for kindergarten although the entry age for kindergarten has been reached. The parents ask that the child be allowed to enter kindergarten the following school year when, normally, the child would begin grade one. Usually Edmonton Public school administrators, as in most other school systems, agree with these parental suggestions and allow some children late entry into kindergarten. Unfortunately, statistics were not available about this type of delayed entry, so the study concentrated on actual repetition of the kindergarten year.

In the 1980s all aspects of education are being subjected to close scrutiny by North American society. Teachers and school principals must be prepared to explain and defend school policies, including kindergarten retention. Since the retention of children is a common procedure at all grade levels, it is of vital importance for educators to clearly understand the implications that retention may have for a child and also be able to provide valid reasons for each use of retention. This study may provide helpful information for educators who are considering kindergarten retention

for students or who are being asked to explain and justify their decisions. The study may also stimulate a necessary periodic review of retention policies and practices in kindergarten.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to survey kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals in Edmonton Public Schools to determine their attitudes toward retention. The study compared the attitudes of these two groups. The study examined the retention recommendations of kindergarten teachers in Edmonton Public Schools and endeavoured to discover the process by which these decisions are made, as well as the level of teacher satisfaction with their personal recommendations. The study also proposed to investigate the feelings of teachers and principals about options to retention in kindergarten.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It was expected that the analysis of data gathered during the study would provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of kindergarten teachers toward retention?
2. What are the attitudes of elementary school principals toward retention?
3. What differences and similarities are there between the attitudes toward retention of kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals?
4. How frequently do kindergarten teachers recommend retention?
5. How satisfied are kindergarten teachers with their recommendations?
6. What factors do kindergarten teachers consider when deciding whether or not to recommend retention?
7. Whom do kindergarten teachers consult when considering retention for a child?
8. Would teachers prefer alternatives to kindergarten retention?
9. Would principals prefer alternatives to kindergarten retention?
10. What differences and similarities are there in the preferred alternatives to retention of kindergarten teachers and principals?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following are definitions of terms as they are used in the study:

Attitude This term is used to describe a manner of acting, feeling or thinking that shows one's disposition, opinion or mental set toward or away from an object, concept or situation.

Promotion This term is used to describe the process by which a student is advanced to the next school grade or academic level.

Merit Promotion This term is used to describe the advancement of a student to the next school grade based solely on test results.

Social Promotion This term is used to describe the advancement to the next higher grade of a child who has not reached the minimum standard of academic achievement needed for promotion. Social promotion allows a child to be in a class with children of similar age and size.

Retention This term is used to describe the practice of having a child spend two consecutive school years in the same

grade; frequently called non-promotion or repeating a grade.

Self-Concept This term refers to one's attitude toward one's own capabilities and one's self as a person.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study surveyed all kindergarten teachers and a majority of the elementary school principals employed by the Edmonton Public School Board. Elementary school principals in five of the six administrative areas in the school district were included in the survey. The kindergarten teachers received and returned their questionnaires through the school district's mail service. The principals received and returned their questionnaires at monthly meetings of their areas within the Edmonton Public School system.

The survey instrument was a questionnaire made up of two distinct parts. The first section, identical for teachers and principals, included 33 statements about retention and a five point Likert response scale for respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The second section of the questionnaire was prepared in two versions, one for the teachers and one for the principals. In this section information about

1) teaching and administrative experience, 2) personal experience with kindergarten retention recommendations, and 3) feelings about retention alternatives was gathered by means of open-ended questions.

The retention statements were grouped into five categories. Each category represented one area of concern in the research study. Frequency counts, cross-tabulations of responses and Chi-square calculations made up the statistical analysis for the first section of the questionnaire. Frequency counts and content analysis were used in the second section of the questionnaire.

PILOT STUDY

A pilot study of the proposed research questionnaire was conducted with teachers in attendance at a University of Alberta evening course in Early Childhood Education. The pilot study was used to determine if the retention statements and open-ended questions would be meaningful to kindergarten teachers and principals completing the questionnaire.

ASSUMPTIONS

For the purpose of this study it has been assumed that:

1. Attitudes toward retention can be measured by a five point Likert response scale.
2. The researcher's bias as a kindergarten teacher has been overcome by seeking professional advice in the preparation of the questionnaire.

LIMITATIONS

In this study the following limitations must be recognized:

1. The questionnaire was sent to the kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals of only one school district. Since attitudes, current retention practices, and the level of satisfaction among educators with those practices may vary from one school district to another, the conclusions of the study may not be generalizable to all kindergarten teachers and their supervising principals.
2. Two methods of data collection were employed for the study; teachers received their questionnaires through the mail while principals saw the researcher at area meetings. However, it was felt that any difference in response as a result of the data collection method would be slight and would not reduce the validity of the comparisons

between the two groups.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The first chapter outlines the current dilemma about the use of kindergarten retention and describes the need for the study. The first chapter also includes the purpose of the study, definitions of terms, the design of the study, assumptions and limitations. The second chapter presents a survey of literature related to the study. Chapter III describes the population surveyed, the formulation and validation of the questionnaire, the research procedure and the methods used to analyze the data. The information collected in the study will be presented and discussed in Chapter IV. The final chapter includes a summary of the findings, a discussion of the implications for educators, as well as suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A review of the related literature reveals very little research or theory dealing specifically with kindergarten retention. However, many teachers and researchers, concerned with the young child's readiness for grade one, have suggested a delay in school entry or kindergarten retention as a solution. The controversy about the use of retention in any grade has produced a massive volume of research and personal opinion articles. In recent years a strong "back-to-the-basics" movement has swept across the United States bringing with it a new emphasis on merit promotion. The promotion-retention controversy has also produced guidelines for teachers to follow in making critical retention decisions. A limited amount of research has studied the attitudes of teachers toward retention. These areas in educational literature: (1) school entry age, (2) the promotion-retention controversy, (3) the trend to merit promotion, (4) retention guidelines, and (5) teachers' attitudes; can be applied to the study of retention recommendations made at the

kindergarten level.

School Entry Age

When considering the use of retention at the kindergarten level, attention must also be given to the related problem of school entry age. Some educators feel the use of retention in the early grades would diminish if a later school entry age was established; other educators believe kindergarten retention prevents immature, unready children from meeting failure and frustration in their first experiences with formal education. Often the same arguments, unreadiness for the academic and social expectations of Grade 1, are used to support both kindergarten retention and an older school entry age. The Alberta Teachers' Association's Grade One Entrance Age Report (Brunanski, 1983) revealed a high level of concern among primary teachers in Edmonton Public Schools about the ability of many young children to cope successfully with the school programs of kindergarten, grades one, two and three. The teachers surveyed felt a young entry age was usually related to subsequent difficulty in academic achievement, emotional adjustment and social adjustment.

Many educational researchers have attempted to find

a relationship between the child's age at school entrance and the level of adjustment and academic success achieved by the child. Many studies have tried to determine the best age at which children should enter school; the age at which children can achieve success and avoid retention.

The effect of entry age on academic achievement

Research findings that discuss the relationship between age and academic performance are the most numerous. The selection, arranged chronologically, is representative of research in the area, both in the nature of the studies and in the findings reported. To limit the length of the review, any research published prior to 1950 or opinion articles that did not report on research studies or surveys has been omitted.

Hamalainen (1952) conducted a survey of 33 elementary school administrators in Nassau County, New York. Children entering kindergarten at less than four years, nine months were considered underage. The principals reported greater problems in scholastic achievement for the underage group than for the normal and average group.

King (1955) followed the progress of 104 children

of average I.Q. over a six year period in the elementary schools of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Age required for grade 1 entrance was five years, eight months. The younger group experienced difficulty attaining grade level academic skills and included a larger number of grade retentions.

Carter (1956) studied 100 children from grade two to six in Austin, Texas. The underage group was less than six years at grade 1 entry; the normal age group was over six years. The younger children had a lower academic performance in arithmetic, spelling, reading and English at each grade level.

Baer (1958) followed the progress of 146 students through eleven years of school in Kansas City, Missouri. His underage group scored significantly lower marks in arithmetic, reading and social studies and had more grade retentions. Similarly, Hamplemann (1959) found a relationship between school entry age and eventual reading success at grade six in Bloomington, Indiana. Students in the oldest quartile had a mean reading achievement score seven months above those in the youngest quartile.

Dickenson and Larsen (1963) studied 480 fourth graders in Sioux Falls. Their older group, who were six years

or older at grade 1 entrance, scored higher on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The researchers theorized that the persistance of superiority until fourth grade may be a "snowball" effect whereby the older, more able child receives positive reinforcement early which then motivates further success. Carroll (1963) found similar results with third graders in upstate New York. The youngest group, who were not five years old until the last quarter of grade 1, had consistently lower scores on the California Reading and Arithmetic Tests.

Hall (1963) examined the relationship between entry age and retention in Seattle. In the chosen school district, 79% of the retained elementary students were considered young (i.e. less than six years, six months at entry into grade 1). When tested on the S.R.A. Achievement Series, the average age retainees scored at a higher level than the younger retainees.

Miller and Norris (1967) studied 135 students in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. On readiness tests administered in kindergarten the early group (5 years, 8 months to 5 years, 11 months at grade 1 entry) scored significantly lower than the older students. However, by the end of four years, the early group's achievement was not significantly different.

Binkley (1969), in another Tennessee study, found other variables, such as sex and socio-economic status, were better predictors of school success than age.

Ilika (1969) matched two groups of Oregon children on sex, I. Q. and socia-economic status and found the older children had a faster rate of scholastic development than the younger children. Eventually this rate declined but never disappeared.

Hirst (1970) completed a study which challenges the reliability of entry age as a predictor of academic success. She found age at kindergarten entrance had no significance in predicting scores for first and second grade reading and arithmetic. Johnston (1964) conducted a statewide survey in Illinois and found the youngest children had the poorest reading achievement and the highest retention rate. Halliwell and Stein (1974) also studied achievement in reading and arithmetic related to the entry age of Long Island students. There, the oldest group's superiority persisted until grade 5.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Ames and Ilg, researchers from the Gesell Institute forcefully stated their belief that a large percentage of American children begin grade 1 before they are ready for formal reading instruction.

The Gesell Institute recommends starting children in school based on behavioral age rather than chronological age. The Institute has developed a battery of tests to determine school readiness. Ames and Ilg recommend careful screening of school beginners and a minimum grade 1 entry age of six years for girls and six years six months for boys.

In 1977 William Hedges produced a massive review of the literature on the relationship of entry age and school success - At What Age Should Children Enter Grade 1? Hedges' review covered research from 1915 to 1976. He found an overwhelming proportion of the studies indicated the young child was at a disadvantage in school when compared to older schoolmates.

Davis, Trimble and Vincent (1980) examined the school records of almost 19,000 children in Kentucky in grades 1, 4 and 8. They found the oldest third scored significantly higher in reading, language, math and total achievement in grades 1 and 4. By grade 8 the oldest group was significantly higher in only one area - reading.

Despite a few contradictory findings, these research results indicate a definite relationship between school entry age and academic success. Older grade 1 entrants have a greater

chance of success. Virtually all of the school districts studied had minimum entry ages that were older than the current minimum entry age in Alberta.

Recently two Alberta studies have examined the effect of entry age on academic achievement. Koep (1980) examined the scores on the Canadian Tests of Basic Skills of 1,341 children in grades 3, 4, 6 and 8 in Lethbridge. Although the results were inconclusive, "it appeared that in some subject areas the early starters scored as well as average and late starters by the time they had reached Grades 6 and 8" (Koep, p. ii). The Grade One Entrance Age Study (Pain, 1981) was conducted with 800 St. Albert students in grades 2, 6, 8 and 10. Pain concluded that, despite the absence of clear statistical differences, "some very young students score lower than their peers in academic and social areas, and that this difference persists into Junior High School" (Pain, p. 3). The young group consisted of students with January or February birthdates; that is children who were 5 years, 6 months to 5 years, 8 months at the beginning of grade 1. Young students in this study were retained more frequently.

The effect of entry age on social and emotional adjustment

Teachers have expressed concern, not only about the academic performance of their youngest students, but also about the ability of young entrants to adjust socially and emotionally within the school environment. Frequently the concern of teachers for their young, immature students leads to kindergarten retention recommendations and a call for older entry ages. Several of the studies already cited examined social and emotional maturity along with academic performance. In addition, a few researchers focused mainly on the adjustment of young entrants.

Hamalainen (1952) asked elementary school principals to identify the most common problems faced by under-age and normal-age children. For grades 1 to 3, 91% of the principals felt under-age children faced social adjustment problems, while 45% felt normal-age children faced such problems. Ninety-four percent felt under-age children had emotional problems, while only 33% felt normal-age children had similar problems. This discrepancy was also reported in grades 4 to 6.

King (1955) found the younger group in her study had lower average attendance, more special guidance and speech help, and markedly more were identified by their teachers as maladjusted. Baer (1958) asked teachers to rate their students

on group activity, attitude to school rules, appearance, dependability, emotional stability, initiative and co-operativeness. For all traits the older group was rated significantly higher than the younger group. In a similar study of teacher ratings, Carroll (1963) found the older group rated significantly higher on three out of six traits and evenly rated on the others. Mawhinney (1964) found the poor adjustment of many early entrants was the reason the Grosse Point school board ended its early entrance program.

Evans (1974) and Binkley (1968-69) examined the relationship between entry age and school adjustment for culturally deprived, inner city children. Evans found the younger group had a significantly higher score on conduct disorder, while Binkley found age relatively unimportant in personal and social adjustment.

Weinstein (1968-69) studied disturbed children in a residential program and in Nashville Public Schools. Both groups of disturbed students had been significantly younger on school entrance. Even the younger children within her non-disturbed control group were viewed more negatively by classmates and had a higher failure rate than the older students in the same group. Weinstein's assumptions about the importance

of school entry age relative to classmates will be discussed next.

Relative entry age

Most of the research on school entry age is concerned with finding the best age for beginning formal education. However, there was no uniformity of minimum entry ages noted in the research. All the studies compared older and younger students within the normal twelve month age range of a grade. Laura Weinstein (1968-69) approached the problem of school entrance age with the hypothesis that it is the child's age relative to classmates, rather than the child's actual chronological age, that determines the child's level of achievement and adjustment. The youngest children in a grade 1 class are at a disadvantage because they are the youngest not because they fall below a magical best entry age of five years, six months or six years. "Adjusting the cut-off date would solve nothing as long as first graders continue to show so much variability in ... maturity; the younger children would continue to be severely penalized" (Weinstein, p. 27).

The age of entry has less importance when the school is prepared to develop a curriculum that allows for the many

levels of readiness common to grade 1 classes. A flexible curriculum might ameliorate the difficulties caused by the immaturity of some grade 1 entrants and by the developmental range so common in a grade (Ammons and Goodlad 1955, Johnston 1964, and Binkley 1969). Miller and Norris (1967) found individualized reading instruction was effective in reducing differences in achievement between age groups.

The question of the best age to start school leads to a more fundamental issue. Should the child be ready for school or the school ready for the child?

Promotion-Retention Controversy

The controversy over the value of retention began in the mid-1800's when elementary schools were divided into grade levels. Despite the ongoing arguments, both for and against retention of students, the practice of retention is common in Canadian and American schools. Many strong viewpoints are held by educators on both sides of the debate. The large body of literature on the promotion-retention controversy will be summarized in the following sections.

Effect of retention on academic achievement

The most common reason given for the use of retention is unsatisfactory academic achievement. Many educators believe mastery of basic skills and subject matter is necessary for a student to work successfully at the next grade level. Some students need extra time to reach the minimum mastery of a grade level and retention is often used to provide this additional learning time. Many researchers have studied the effect of retention on academic performance.

As early as 1911, Keyes (quoted in Bocks, 1977, p. 379) conducted a seven year study of 5,000 pupils. He discovered that of the large number retained during the study only 20% did better, while 39% showed no change and 40% did worse. In 1936, Arthur compared the academic achievement of 60 grade 1 repeaters with the achievement of nonrepeaters of the same mental age. She found the average retained child learned about the same in two years as the average nonretained child learned in one year (Arthur, 1936). In 1956, Coffield and Blommers discovered that slow-learning children who are retained in a grade and slow-learning children who are promoted, eventually perform at the same level when their performance is measured in the same higher grade, in spite of the fact that the retained students spent an extra year reaching

the grade (Coffield and Blommers, 1956).

Chansky (1964) studied a group of students who were at risk for retention in grade 1. The more promising students in the group were promoted. After a year, Chansky found the promoted students were significantly ahead in vocabulary and reading on the California Achievement Test, although they were still below grade expectations.

Dobbs and Neville (1967) also studied the effects of retention on first graders. They attempted to overcome initial differences by matching 30 pairs of children, one of whom was retained and one promoted. Over a two year period, they found significantly greater gains in reading and arithmetic achievement for the promoted children.

Abidin, Golladay and Howerton (1971) conducted a six year study of first or second grade retainees and a group of low performing, but promoted students. They found no short-term positive or negative effects from retention, but they did find a significant long-term deterioration in achievement and ability for the retained students compared to the promoted students.

Wright (1979) studied the impact of grade 1 retention on grade 3 performance and found a slight, but not sig-

nificant, advantage for the retained group. She concluded that the achievement results were not great enough to justify the use of retention for these students.

Kerzner (1982) studied elementary students who had been retained once and had completed at least one grade level beyond the repeated grade. Test scores revealed significant gains for the retained students, especially in grades 1 to 3.

Also in 1982, Powell studied the effect of retention on academic achievement of elementary students. He found retention did not consistently improve test scores; however, the earlier the child was retained and the higher the child's standing before retention, the greater the improvement.

In 1983, Rose, Medway, Cantrell and Marus looked at 25 studies that examined the effect of retention on academic achievement. These studies were conducted in the United States between 1955 and 1980. They found promoted students made academic gains of 8-12 months while retained students gained an average of 6 months. "That is, it often takes two years for the retained child to learn what the promoted child learns in one year" (Rose, Medway, and others, p. 206).

Elligett and Tocco (1983) evaluated a new promotion-retention policy in Pinellas County, Florida. They compared

achievement test scores of students before retention, during the retention year, and after the completion of another grade. They found a marked increase in median rank in the retention year and then a drop, but not to the initial level, in the year following retention.

Although most retained students show gains in academic achievement, they fall behind those students of similar ability who were promoted. Almost all the studies show this weakness in the use of retention for encouragement of academic achievement. Jackson (1965) claims these studies may be marred by the same weakness which creates a bias in favour of retention. Each study compares retained and promoted students of comparable ability. It can be assumed that the retained students have problems not present in their promoted classmates or else they would not have been retained. Therefore the promoted group would be expected to do better. Despite this qualifying condition, the research does not indicate much value in the use of retention to ensure academic achievement.

Effect of retention on self-concept and social-emotional adjustment

For decades some educators have argued that there are harmful effects related to retention. Retention has been linked to poor self-concept and problems in social and emotional adjustment in school. Teachers fear that retained students may be rejected by their peers, view themselves as failures and sink into a pattern of failure in their school work. On the other hand, weak students who are socially promoted, probably find themselves at the bottom of the class, and may also suffer blows to their self-esteem. The problem is trying to establish a cause and effect relationship between retention and self-concept.

Anfison (1941) studied 116 pairs of students who were matched on attendance, age, sex, intelligence, and socioeconomic status. One had been regularly promoted while the other had been retained. The regularly promoted students were significantly better in their personal and social adjustment.

Goodlad (1954) reported that promoted children were rejected significantly less by classmates as persons not desirable for very best friends. He found the adjustment of the retained students declined over the retention year while the adjustment of promoted students improved. Similarly, Morrison

and Perry (1956) found a distinct level of nonacceptance for older, retained students.

Godfrey (1971) studied 1,200 students in grades 6 and 7 and their feelings of self-worth on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale. She found that the repeaters had poor self-concepts and that they tended to blame their retention on factors over which they had no control.

In 1973 White and Howard examined the self-concepts of sixth grade students who had been retained once, more than once, or not at all. The students who had never been retained had the highest scores, the students with one retention were significantly lower, and the students with more than one retention were significantly lower still.

Finlayson (1977) came up with different results when he conducted a two year study of 585 grade 1 students. He had three groups - retained students, promoted students and borderline students. At the beginning of the study the promoted group had the highest self-concept, followed by the borderline group, and then the retained. During the first year the self-concept scores of the promoted and borderline groups increased, and the retained group remained the same. After retention or promotion, in the second year of the study,

there was some decrease in the self-concept of the promoted and borderline groups but an increase for the retained students.

Plummer (1982) also found retained students had higher self-concepts which she labelled "actual" self-concept. Actual self-concept was based on the difference between real self-concept and ideal self-concept. Since previous retention had caused the retained group to lower their ideal standards, they did not set such high goals for themselves. Then equal accomplishments led to greater increases in self-concept for the retained group than for the promoted group. Plummer also found discrimination against retained students in this study of second and fifth grade students.

These studies confirm the fear that retention may pose a threat to a child's sense of self-worth and successful interaction with classmates.

Effect of retention on motivation

Some teachers argue that the threat of grade repetition motivates many lazy or indifferent students to work harder. Motivation has frequently been given as a reason for maintaining a retention policy in a school district. Unfortunately very little research has been concerned with the

effectiveness of retention as a motivating factor in academic achievement.

Otto and Melby (1935) studied the impact of the threat of failure on 352 second and fifth grade students. One group was told that any student who did not do well would be retained, while the second group was told all students would be promoted regardless of their achievement. There was no significant difference in the academic achievement of the two groups. In addition, teachers felt the unthreatened group showed no decline in work habits or attitude. Another study on the threat of retention was conducted by Kowitz and Armstrong (1961). They found students who were in no danger of being retained improved their performance when threatened, while low-achievers on the borderline of being retained actually performed worse when threatened.

This limited evidence seems to invalidate the commonly held belief that the threat of retention can prompt weak students to work harder.

Kindergarten retention

One study which focused on retention in kindergarten (Skuba, 1979) is especially valuable because it investigated

patterns of development of ten children in Edmonton schools prior to and following kindergarten retention. Skuba found the source of the retention decision to be an important indicator of the potential success of retention for the child. When parents suggested retention to the school, all the children succeeded in grade 1; when the teacher initiated the retention suggestion, the academic achievement of the children varied widely. Parental co-operation appears to be desirable in the retention of kindergarten children. Skuba concluded:

> Since little is known about the effects of retention on children, caution should be observed in its prescription to meet all problems. Another look should be taken at alternative policies possible in coping with children's scholastic differences. ... Perhaps more flexible accommodation of individual differences may overcome many of the problems produced by policies of non-promotion. (Skuba, p. 138).

Literature reviews

In the past decade several reviews of the literature on the promotion-retention controversy have been undertaken:- Jackson, 1975; Hess, 1978; Baenen, 1980; Bossing and Brien, 1980; and Chafe, 1984. None of these reviews find clear evidence to support either stringent retention or social

promotion. All the reviews suggested more research and careful attention by teachers and administrators to the multitude of factors that may be significant in a promotion-retention decision. A look at these literature reviews gives an educator a valuable exposure to the conclusions drawn by other researchers as they surveyed the vast field of writing about the use of retention in the schools.

The most extensive and most frequently cited review was done by Gregg Jackson (1975). In his review Jackson located three types of studies completed since 1911. The first type compared students retained under normal school policies with students promoted under normal school policies. The major problem with this design according to Jackson, was the bias toward the benefits of promotion. As he expected, 136 of the 204 total studies favoured promotion. The second type of study compared students before and after retention, and here the bias was toward retention. The third type of study compared randomly promoted or retained students who had been experiencing difficulties in school. Only three studies fell in this category and all were conducted prior to 1940. Jackson preferred the third design type and recommended more research of this nature to clarify the mostly biased results

already available.

Nevertheless, Jackson felt schools would be reluctant to randomly select students for promotion or retention in order to carry out valid research. Based on the information available, Jackson concluded:

> Those educators who retain pupils in a grade do so without valid research evidence to indicate that such treatment will provide greater benefits to students with academic or adjustment difficulties than will promotion to the next grade. This conclusion should not be interpreted to mean that promotion is better than retention but, rather, that the accumulated research evidence is so poor that valid inferences cannot be drawn concerning the relative benefits of these two options (Jackson, p. 627).

Hess (1978) provided a detailed historical overview of the promotion-retention debate. Hess found that studies of the effects of retention on academic achievement are generally inconclusive and suggested that remedial instruction within the grade level may be more valuable than older methods of retention.

Baenen and her collaborators on A Research Summary: The Effects of Grade Retention on Elementary Students echo Jackson's conclusions: "Many studies have found that some students benefit, some stay the same, and some suffer from

being retained...most of the research available, however, has serious methodological problems that make any conclusions drawn tentative at best" (Baenen, p. 1).

Bossing and Brien (1980) conclude "that grade retention may be beneficial for a small number of students; however, it does not seem to help most students" (Bossing and Brien p. 20). This review emphasizes the complexity of formulating a fair retention policy. They recommend retention decisions he made on an individual basis with the involvement of the student, parents and educators. They also conclude that retention is not for all low achievers:

> Students who seem to benefit most from retention are...first-graders, who have good social/emotional adjustment and are a year or two below grade level in achievement. Students who are severely deficient in academic skills, or who exhibit serious social/emotional problems, may be better served by special education (Bossing and Brien, p. 21).

Similarly Chafe (1984) concludes that the research on grade retention indicates that it may be beneficial for a few students, but it does not seem to help the majority of those retained. Chafe emphasizes the importance of flexible retention policies which allow decisions to be made on an individual basis. He believes when educators are in doubt about

retaining or promoting a student, the child should be promoted.

"Back-to-the-Basics" Movement

Despite a lack of clear evidence indicating the value of retention and a widespread plea for caution by researchers, support is gathering for increased use of retention. The recent "back-to-the-basics" movement in the United States has been accompanied by the introduction of minimum competency testing and increased retention rates.

Several important American reports have suggested an end to social promotion: "Placement and grouping of students, as well as promotion and graduation policies, should be guided by the academic progress of students and their instructional needs, rather than by rigid adherence to age" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The support for retention is widespread among the North American public: "Promotion from grade to grade based on examinations and not on social promotion is favoured by a substantial majority (75%) of survey respondents. This view is shared by parents of school children and by those who have no children in schools" (Gallup, 1983, p. 38). This represents a substantial increase from the 1978 Gallup poll which found 68%

of the respondents wanted promotion to be based on successful examination results. There is growing public pressure on schools to incorporate competency tests as a mandatory part of promotion procedures.

American school districts are now adopting more stringent policies governing promotion and retention. A highly publicized promotion policy was adopted in Greensville County, Virginia in 1973. The Greensville program based promotion entirely on standardized achievement test scores; if a student could not perform at grade level, he was not promoted. Half-step promotions and special needs classes were created to deal with the large number of retained students. Debate raged over the program and some educators became disturbed that test scores were becoming the goal of education (Koons, 1977). In 1981 a lawsuit which charged blacks were disproportionately retained ended the Greensville program.

In 1977 Pinellas County Schools in Florida began using a uniform standard for promotion at each grade level. Some exceptions based on size, age, and previous retentions were allowed at the beginning of the program. Evaluation indicates an increase in the retention rate and a higher level of academic achievement by retained students (Elligett and

Tocco, 1983).

It is quite possible that public and political opinion will lead to many replications of the Pinellas County decision. Already similar trends are developing in Alberta education policies. The introduction of standardized tests at several grade levels may be followed by stricter standards for promotion.

Retention Guidelines

Decades of argument over retention have not produced a conclusion, but they have revealed a long list of items which trouble teachers as they weigh each retention decision. Several authors have developed recommendations, guidelines or decision instruments to assist teachers.

Light's Retention Scale (1977) identifies nineteen items which Light sees as the important variables related to the suitability of retention for a student. A simple rating scale provides a total score which suggests the student is an excellent, good, fair, marginal or poor condidate for retention. Many of Light's categories- sex, age, knowledge of English, size, attendance, parents' school participation, etc.- have some validity for decisions made at the kindergarten level.

A few items such as age, social immaturity and emotional adjustment have been identified by Edmonton teachers as factors affecting school success (Brunanski, 1983). Light's scale has been criticized for lack of predictive validity (Sandoval 1980 and 1982), but it does give the teacher a guideline to use for reference in making decisions.

Liebermann (1980) developed a decision-making model for teachers considering retention. Liebermann has divided the items to be considered before retaining a student into three groups: (1) child, (2) family, and (3) school factors. Many of Liebermann's factors repeat items on Light's Retention Scale, although they disagree on the influence of at least one item, poor knowledge of English. Liebermann places more emphasis on factors within the school than Light. Liebermann stresses that school factors such as the attitude of the principal and the teacher to retention as well as availability of special education services may determine the appropriateness of retention for a child.

Lindvig (1983) stresses the need to see the whole child and his or her progress in school before deciding to retain. Age, maturity and social adjustment of the child should be considered. Similarly, Rose, Medway, Cantrell and

Marus (1983) state that retention decisions should be made on an individual basis by teachers and psychologists who are familiar with research in the area. They emphasize the need to assess the individual programs set up for retained students. Placement alternatives and varied instructional methods are needed to replace mere recycling for retained students.

Teacher Attitude To Retention

Very little research has attempted to determine teachers' attitudes toward retention. Frazier (1978) conducted a survey of 150 teachers in Upper Cumberland, Tennessee. The results of the study revealed that "although the majority of teachers felt that retention does not promote subject mastery and that self-concept should be considered in retention decisions, the majority of teachers continue to retain students" (Frazier, p. 37).

Frazier found that teachers believe that retention does not create behavior problems, cause peer rejection, contribute to school dropouts, nor discourage learning, despite research findings to the contrary. She recommended that in-service programs be designed to help teachers become more aware of the possible negative effects of retention on students

and to help teachers realize that alternatives to retention should be used instead of retention.

Chapter Summary

Since very little research has been devoted specifically to kindergarten retention, this literature review examined research that concentrated on the elementary grades.

The related problem of an appropriate school entry age has received much attention. The younger students in a grade tend to experience more problems academically and emotionally than their older classmates. A flexible curriculum and instructional methods that accommodate a range of individual needs can ease the problems of young students and may provide an effective alternative to kindergarten retention.

Research regarding retention shows the practice does not significantly improve academic performance and may damage self-concept. Despite reserach findings which consistently contraindicate retention, the argument between retention's advocates and detractors remains unresolved. Much of the research evidence has been criticized as containing a bias towards either promotion or retention. Such questions about

the validity of the research and the presence of some conflicting results have led research reviewers to recommend cautious use of retention and careful investigation of other options that may be available for weak students.

CHAPTER III

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Chapter III discusses the design of the study, describing the population surveyed, the formulation and validation of the questionnaire, the distribution and collection of the questionnaire, and the data analysis.

THE POPULATION

The Edmonton Public School District was selected for this research study for several reasons. Edmonton Public Schools have the largest number of kindergartens of the school districts in the Edmonton area and therefore provide the largest number of questionnaire recipients easily reached through one school district. Partly due to the large size of the school district, Edmonton Public Schools have a wide variety of kindergarten programs located in a range of socio-economic neighbourhoods. There are bilingual kindergarten programs offered in French, German, Hebrew, Arabic, Ukrainian, Cree and

Mandarin Chinese; a developmental kindergarten and kindergartens for the physically and mentally handicapped. Kindergartens can be found in inner city schools, established middle class neighbourhoods, subsidized housing complexes, new suburban areas and upper class districts. Most kindergartens are part of elementary schools, although a few are housed in elementary-junior high schools. The volume and range of kindergartens in the school district was most likely to provide a population of teachers and principals who had used, or at least considered, retention in a great assortment of individual situations.

Originally the purpose of the research study was to examine the retention recommendations of kindergarten teachers and the attitudes of those teachers toward retention. While preparing the study, the researcher realized that the decisions of kindergarten teachers are not made in a void. Several faculty members at the University of Alberta and the Edmonton Public Schools Early Childhood consultants felt that the school principal frequently influenced the decisions made by teachers in that school. As a result of these discussions, the study was expanded to include all the principals who have

direct administrative responsibility for the kindergarten teachers in Edmonton Public Schools.

The total population surveyed included 174 kindergarten teachers and their 144 supervising principals. This population provided a relatively large sample for an opinion survey of teachers and a very thorough examination of retention practices and attitudes at the kindergarten level within one school district. Additional details about the population will be reported in Chapter IV under findings.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Formulation of the Questionnaire

Part A of the questionnaire was designed to gather information about the attitudes of kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals toward retention. Part A, identical for both the teachers and principals, consisted of 33 statements about retention (see Appendix 1). The respondent was asked to circle the answer on a Likert scale of five responses that best described her/his level of agreement with each statement.

The statements were drawn from the literature related to retention and school readiness. Many of the issues raised on both sides of the promotion-retention controversy have been incorporated into questionnaire items making up a large section of Part A. Common beliefs about the value of retention for struggling students as well as frequently stated concerns about the negative influence of school failure on self-concept, behavior and social interaction are found in these statements. Part A also included current arguments for changes in Alberta's school entry age, as well as arguments frequently used for kindergarten retention. The retention decision guidelines created by Light (1977) and Liebermann (1980) were another source for attitude statements. Each item applicable to kindergarten retention in these guidelines was used in some way.

Two versions of Part B of the questionnaire were developed; one for the teachers and one for the principals (see Appendix 2). The first four items on the teachers' version and the first two items on the principals' version concentrated on personal information about the teaching career of the respondent. Teachers were asked about their age, their

retention recommendations for kindergarten children, and their kindergarten and general teaching experience. Principals were asked about their teaching and administrative experience.

In addition, both versions of Part B contained open-ended questions about the respondents' personal feelings and their individual school situation. Although these questions in Part B were adjusted to reflect the different roles of teachers and principals, both versions asked about the school's retention policy and the respondent's feelings regarding alternatives to retention.

The initial draft of the questionnaire was evaluated by Dr. Tom McGuire of the Division of Educational Research Services who suggested changes in the questionnaire format and wording as well as further consultation with practitioners in early childhood education. Next informal discussions about the questionnaire were held with kindergarten and grade one teachers, and the Early Childhood Education Supervisor and consultant for the school district being surveyed. As a result of these consultations the study was expanded to include elementary school principals and the desire for retention

alternatives was emphasized. The arrangement of the response scale was adjusted and some statements were reworded.

Pilot Study

The validity of the questionnaire was established through a pilot study involving about 25 students in an evening class of Ed. C.I. 404, the senior undergraduate course in Early Childhood Education at the University of Alberta. The purpose of the pilot study was to verify whether the statements in Part A and the questions in Part B were comprehensible to classroom teachers. The pilot study was conducted several months prior to the beginning of the research study and before the decision to expand the study to include principals. The students in this evening class were all teachers, most of them currently employed to teach kindergarten or the primary grades (1-3).

The class members answered the questionnaire individually and then joined in a spontaneous discussion about retention. The students were encouraged to ask questions about the survey and to identify any ambiguities which they felt existed in the questionnaire. A few statements from

Part A were mentioned and possible rewordings suggested. These suggestions were followed in order to clarify the questionnaire.

When the decision to include elementary school principals in the study was made there was not enough time left in the school year to permit another pilot study with principals before the actual survey. In order to check the suitability of the questionnaire for principals, a few elementary school principals were asked to respond to the questionnaire. No further suggestions were offered at this time.

DATA COLLECTION

Two methods of questionnaire distribution and collection were selected to ensure the highest possible rate of return. Questionnaires were distributed to the whole population to be surveyed during April. Questionnaires were returned over a two month period until the final cut-off date in mid-June. The timing of the data collection meant teachers and principals were answering the questionnaire as retention decisions were being made in their schools.

In order to conduct the survey of the principals the researcher attended the school district's monthly area meetings for April. Although this school district is divided into six administrative areas, one area had not scheduled a central meeting which limited attendance to five area meetings. At each meeting an explanation of the research project was given and the principals were assured that their identities would be unknown to the researcher. Then the questionnaires were distributed and the principals in attendance were given time to respond. This method may have limited principals who wanted to make long, well thought out replies to the open-ended questions. However it did ensure a high rate of response from the principals.

There were no meetings through which the kindergarten teachers could be reached in a similar manner. Instead the questionnaires were distributed and collected through the inter-school mail service of the school district. An accompanying letter explained the purpose of the questionnaire and reassured the respondents of the confidentiality with which the submitted information would be treated (see Appendix 3). Questionnaires were addressed to individual teachers in an

effort to make the request more personal, hopefully to prompt the teachers to reply and to prevent the questionnaires from being left undelivered within the schools.

Returns from the teachers were checked by their number codes against a master list of teachers. As the collection period drew to a close, teachers who had not replied were phoned at their schools and reminded of the survey. Throughout the collection period the researcher received a number of requests for replacement questionnaires from teachers who had lost the original; in all cases a second questionnaire was mailed.

DATA ANALYSIS

The Division of Educational Research Services was consulted about appropriate methods of data analysis for this study. Since Part A and Part B of the questionnaire had very different formats for gathering information from the respondents, two types of data analysis were employed.

Data Analysis for Part A

The intent of this part of the study was to describe

the opinion of kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals toward retention. To accomplish this purpose, a standard tabulation of the data was undertaken. Each possible response to the Part A statements was given a numerical rating in order to make the transfer of information from the questionnaire on to key punch file cards possible. Next, the SPSSX computer program was employed to determine frequency counts and percentage proportions for each Part A statement for the two groups, teachers and principals.

To facilitate making comparisons between the responses of the two main groups, teachers and principals, crosstabulations were determined. The Chi-square statistic was calculated to test for significant differences between the responses of the groups to the statements in Part A of the questionnaire. In addition to these comparisons between the teachers and principals, crosstabulations and the Chi-square test of independence were calculated to reveal differences in response among subgroups. Within the teachers' group, comparisons among responses were tabulated for the variables of age and frequency of retention recommendation. With the principals' group, comparisons among the responses were tabulated for the variable of levels of teaching experience.

To allow for greater clarity and ease of analysis in the discussion of the statistical results the Part A statements were grouped according to five categories. Data related to these five categories of retention-promotion controversy, self-concept, kindergarten retention, retention process and special concerns are discussed in Chapter IV.

Data Analysis for Part B

Although two versions of Part B were used in the study, the same method of analysis was employed for the teachers' data and the principals' data.

The initial questions in both versions gathered personal information about the respondents and their teaching careers. For these responses frequency counts and percentage proportions were tabulated.

The open-ended questions in Part B concentrated on the teachers' personal experiences with kindergarten retention recommendations and on the retention alternatives suggested by both teachers and principals. These responses were subjected to a form of content analysis. Although content analysis may be considered a weak research tool because

categories are arbitrarily established and different analysts may come up with different categories, it enabled the researcher to organize and analyze the wealth of data produced in response to the open-ended questions in Part B. To validate the researcher's categories in this analysis, a random selection of questionnaires was shown to other graduate students in Early Childhood Education and possible categorizations were discussed. Content analysis was used to describe trends in the answers, to reveal differences between groups, and to show the attitudes of the population surveyed.

CHAPTER 1V

DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter the findings of the questionnaire will be reported and discussed. The data is presented in two major sections which correspond to Part A and Part B of the questionnaire. The first section discusses the attitudes of kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals toward retention. These attitudes have been drawn from their responses on an opinion rating scale to 33 statements in Part A. The second section of the chapter discusses the responses to open-ended questions about the personal experiences of kindergarten teachers who have considered retention for their students. This section also analyzes the alternatives to retention desired by teachers and principals.

QUESTIONNAIRE RETURNS

Questionnaires were distributed by school mail to 174 kindergarten teachers in Edmonton Public Schools. One hundred and twenty-nine teachers returned questionnaires.

Four questionnaires (2%) were unusable in the study because major portions or the entire questionnaire had not been answered. The remaining 125 questionnaires, 71.8% of the total sample, were fully completed and used in the data analysis. Teachers continued to return questionnaires after the data analysis had begun.

Questionnaires were distributed to the elementary school principals in attendance at administrative meetings of the Edmonton Public School District. This school district is divided into six administrative areas. One hundred and eight (91.5%) of the principals in attendance at five area meetings returned the questionnaires. One administrative area in the school district had not scheduled a meeting and the principals in that area did not receive questionnaires. This reduced the 108 responding principals to 75% of the total elementary school principals in the school district.

QUESTIONNAIRE PART A

One major goal of the study was to examine the attitudes of kindergarten teachers and their supervising principals toward retention. Part A of the questionnaire, identical for both teachers and principals, was designed to assess these

attitudes.

To allow for greater clarity and ease of analysis the statements in Part A have been regrouped into five categories which reflect areas of concern in the research study. Although some statements could be included in two, or even three, categories, each questionnaire item appears only once (see Table 1). The first category, the promotion-retention controversy, includes statements of many common beliefs about the value of retention as well as arguments frequently used against retention. The second category, self-concept, has statements that are all related to the most common arguments against retention, that retention lowers self-concept. The third category, kindergarten retention, includes reasons for the use of retention at the kindergarten level as well as concerns about Alberta's young entry age. The fourth category, retention decision process, includes statements about the actual process undertaken by teachers who recommend retention. Finally, the fifth category, special concerns, involves extra factors such as prolonged absence from school, handicaps and second languages which may be considered in retention recommendations. The first three categories contain two-thirds of the statements because they represent the greatest concerns of teachers who must make retention decisions.

TABLE 1

QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS (PART A)
ACCORDING TO CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

Category	Statement Number
1. Promotion-retention controversy	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 25
2. Self-concept	7, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27
3. Kindergarten retention	28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33
4. Retention decision process	15, 17, 18, 19
5. Special concerns	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

In Part A of the questionnaire respondents were asked to express their opinions using a Likert scale with possible answers of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree and insufficient information about the statement to comment. To summarize the responses and show majority views easily, the answers strongly agree and agree were added together and considered agree while strongly disagree and disagree were added together and considered disagree.

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Retention

Tables 2 to 6 show the teachers' responses by percentage and give response summaries for each statement in Part A of the questionnaire. Each table represents one category which reflects an area of concern in the research study. Since the tables clearly show the results of the questionnaire, only selected items will be discussed.

Teacher Attitudes in the Promotion-Retention Controversy Category

Table 2 gives the teachers' responses to statements in the promotion-retention controversy category. The teachers have endorsed many of the traditional arguments in favour of retention. A majority of these kindergarten teachers are in agreement with the most frequently given reason for retention, that retention gives the child additional time to learn skills and subject matter.

The responses to Statement 8, that retention does not usually help a child above grade 4, revealed a great amount of indecision among these kindergarten teachers. A large group were undecided and a similar number felt they had insufficient information to comment. The teachers may lack teaching experience beyond kindergarten or division 1, or may not have had any involvement in retention decisions in

TABLE 2

TEACHER RESPONSES BY PERCENTAGE IN THE

PROMOTION-RETENTION CONTROVERSY CATEGORY OF PART A

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information	Response Summary	
							Agree	Disagree
#1 Retention discourages learning rather than promotes it.	1.6	3.3	15.6	43.4	33.6	2.5	4.9	77.0
#2 Retention allows the child to master subject matter.	13.2	62.0	13.2	6.6	2.5	2.5	75.2	9.1
#3 Retention helps to create classes of similar academic ability.	2.5	21.5	11.6	42.1	14.9	7.4	24.0	57.0
#4 Fear of failure makes a student work harder.	.8	5.8	11.7	53.3	24.2	4.2	6.6	77.5
#5 No student should ever be retained.	0.0	2.4	1.6	39.5	56.5	0.0	2.4	96.0
#6 The youngest children in a grade are more likely candidates for retention than the oldest children in that grade.	13.8	46.3	6.5	26.0	4.9	2.4	60.1	30.9
#8 Retention does not usually help a child above grade 4.	.8	16.3	29.3	22.0	7.3	24.4	17.1	29.3
#25 Retention relieves stress for a low-achieving student.	12.8	52.1	19.7	7.7	1.7	6.0	64.9	9.4

the upper grades.

This group of teachers was unwilling to give up the option of retention. The teachers felt retention was valuable for young children, for providing extra learning time, and for easing stress on weak students. However, the teachers rejected the use of retention as a threat or as a means of creating academically homogeneous classes.

Teacher Attitudes in the Self-Concept Category

Table 3 gives the teachers' responses to statements in the self-concept category of Part A. In their response to Statements 20, 26 and 27, close to or over 80% of the teachers have rejected common worries about the negative influence of retention on the child. These fears - peer rejection, behavior problems, sense of failure - have been documented as valid in the literature on retention (Anfison, Goodlad, Godfrey, White and Howard, Plummer). Teacher responses to Statements 21 and 22 indicate a similar, although not so strongly held, attitude to the relationship between retention and self-concept. Here teachers rejected the idea that retained students feel inferior and develop negative attitudes toward school.

However, the teachers did see potential harm to the

TABLE 3

TEACHER RESPONSES BY PERCENTAGE IN THE

SELF-CONCEPT CATEGORY OF PART A

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information	Response Summary	
							Agree	Disagree
#7 Retention contributes to later school dropout.	0.0	2.4	13.8	43.1	18.7	22.0	2.4	61.8
#16 Retention is unsuccessful if the child is opposed to it.	6.6	29.5	23.0	31.1	.0	9.8	36.1	31.1
#20 Retention contributes to the development of behavior problems.	0.8	3.3	9.1	66.9	14.9	5.0	4.1	81.8
#21 Retained students often feel inadequate or inferior.	1.6	22.1	11.5	54.1	5.7	4.9	23.7	59.8
#22 Retained students frequently develop negative attitudes toward school.	1.7	17.5	6.7	56.7	8.3	9.2	19.2	65.0
#23 Retention serves a useful function in helping students adjust to failure.	0.0	6.7	23.5	37.0	20.2	12.6	6.7	57.2
#24 The more times a child is retained the lower will be her/his self-concept.	6.6	42.1	22.3	11.6	4.1	13.2	48.7	15.7
#26 Children who have been retained are rejected by their classmates.	0.0	6.0	6.0	59.0	27.4	1.7	6.0	86.4
#27 Retention allows a child to feel competent as a learner.	16.9	62.7	9.3	6.8	.8	3.4	79.6	7.6

child's self-concept in multiple retention and in the child's resistance to retention. For the most part, they rejected the argument that retention has a negative influence on self-concept. The kindergarten teachers may be rejecting this argument because they have had little exposure to the research on retention or limited experience with older retained students.

Teacher Attitudes in the Kindergarten Retention Category

Table 4 gives the teachers' responses to statements in the kindergarten retention category of Part A. The most frequently given reasons for the use of retention in kindergarten found strong support among the kindergarten teachers surveyed. Almost 95% of the teachers agreed with the value of kindergarten retention for the socially immature child or the academically unready child.

Almost 80% of the teachers felt young children frequently benefit from kindergarten retention. Kindergarten retention or an older school entry age are often seen as a solution to the problems of the young children with birthdays in December, January or February. Brunanski's survey of primary teachers in 1983 identified a deep concern for these young children and suggested a change in entry age would

TABLE 4

TEACHER RESPONSES BY PERCENTAGE IN THE

KINDERGARTEN RETENTION CATEGORY OF PART A

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information	Response Summary	
							Agree	Disagree
#28 A second year in kindergarten gives an unready child time to master the skills needed for grade 1.	48.8	47.1	2.5	1.7	0.0	0.0	95.9	1.7
#29 Young children frequently benefit from a second year in kindergarten.	33.1	44.6	12.4	5.8	.8	3.3	77.7	6.6
#30 Retention is more effective in kindergarten or grade 1 than in the other grades.	32.5	44.7	13.8	4.1	1.6	3.3	77.2	5.7
#31 A second year in kindergarten gives a socially immature child an opportunity to develop appropriate behavior.	40.3	53.2	4.8	1.6	0.0	0.0	93.5	1.6
#32 Retention decisions in kindergarten are strongly influenced by school policy for grades 1 to 6.	13.0	32.5	18.7	26.8	5.7	3.3	45.5	32.5
#33 A parental decision to put a grade 1 aged child in kindergarten is similar, in many ways, to retention.	11.3	35.5	15.3	28.2	8.1	1.6	46.8	36.3

reduce the retention rate.

The teachers' belief that retention is more effective in kindergarten or grade 1 than in the other grades receives some support in the literature. Light (1977) and Bossing and Brien (1980) conclude that children in the early grades tend to benefit most from retention.

Teacher Attitudes in the Retention Decision Process Category

Table 5 gives the teachers' responses to statements in the retention decision process category of Part A. An overwhelming 99.2% of the kindergarten teachers felt parental support or agreement plays a large role in the success of a retention decision. Similarly over 90% of the teachers disagreed that the decision to retain a child should be made solely by the school. The teachers' belief in sharing retention decisions with the parents is strongly echoed in the literature on retention (Skuba, 1979 and Light, 1977). While the teachers were divided on sharing decisions with their school board's team of specialists in psychology, social work, reading and speech therapy, 20% more felt children who'd been retained should be referred to the Bureau team for further assessment.

TABLE 5

TEACHER RESPONSE BY PERCENTAGE IN THE

RETENTION DECISION PROCESS CATEGORY OF PART A

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information	Response Summary	
							Agree	Disagree
#15 All retained students should be referred to the Bureau team for further assessment.	17.9	38.2	7.3	33.3	1.6	1.6	56.1	34.9
#17 Parental support or agreement plays a large role in the success of a retention decision.	61.3	37.9	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	99.2	0.8
#18 The decision to retain a child should be made solely by the school.	0.8	4.9	3.3	60.2	30.9	0.0	5.7	91.1
#19 The Bureau team should be involved in every decision.	13.1	26.2	14.8	39.3	4.9	1.6	39.3	44.2

Teacher Attitudes in the Special Concerns Category

Table 6 gives the teachers' responses to statements in the special concerns category of Part A. These questionnaire items represent important factors which may influence a teacher who is considering a retention recommendation. However, these factors occur infrequently in individual cases compared to the broad application of general factors found in the other four categories.

It is interesting to note that teachers' responses in this category were much more divided than they were in the other categories. Only one statement, #12, brought strong disagreement that size is a factor in retention. The indecision and diverse attitudes recorded for the other items may come as a result of the teachers' inexperience with these factors.

The teachers' responses in Part A of the questionnaire were cross-tabulated with their age groups and the four frequencies of their retention recommendations. Despite the large number of cross-tabulations no significant differences were noted.

Summary of Teacher Attitudes

This attitude survey of kindergarten teachers showed

TABLE 6

TEACHER RESPONSE BY PERCENTAGE IN THE SPECIAL CONCERNS CATEGORY OF PART A

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information	Response Summary	
							Agree	Disagree
#9 Retention may be justified for a child who is absent a great deal.	4.9	57.7	13.8	17.9	1.6	4.1	62.6	19.5
#10 A learning disabled child will benefit from retention.	1.6	8.9	30.1	32.5	11.4	15.4	10.5	43.9
#11 Students with poor communication skills in English will learn more English if they are retained.	1.6	16.3	22.0	48.0	4.9	7.3	17.9	52.9
#12 The child who is significantly smaller than others the same age is a more suitable candidate for retention.	0.0	15.4	5.7	49.6	26.8	2.4	15.4	76.4
#13 ESL students should be kept with their age peers.	5.7	44.3	18.0	18.0	.8	13.1	50.0	18.8
#14 Physically handicapped students should not be retained.	2.5	11.7	17.5	45.0	1.7	21.7	14.2	46.7

a high level of acceptance of many traditional rationales for the use of retention. The teachers believed retention could encourage learning and ease anxiety for struggling students. The usual arguments for kindergarten retention received tremendous endorsement by the teachers. Almost all the teacher respondents felt kindergarten retention could help the young child, the academically unready child and the socially immature child. The teachers did not express strong, if any, reservation about the potential harm that retention might have for the child's self-concept.

Principals' Attitudes Toward Retention

Tables 7-11 show the principals' responses by percentage and give response summaries for each statement in Part A of the questionnaire. The discussion of each category of Part A will attempt to reveal any patterns in their responses and will not duplicate the information available in the tables.

Principal Attitudes in the Promotion-Retention Controversy Category

Table 7 gives the principals' responses to statements in the promotion-retention category. An overwhelming majority

TABLE 7

PRINCIPAL RESPONSES BY PERCENTAGE IN THE

PROMOTION-RETENTION CONTROVERSY CATEGORY OF PART A

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information	Response Summary	
							Agree	Disagree
#1 Retention discourages learning rather than promotes it.	4.7	14.0	15.9	41.1	20.6	3.7	18.7	61.7
#2 Retention allows the child to master subject matter.	3.8	39.4	29.8	20.2	2.9	3.8	43.2	23.1
#3 Retention helps to create classes of similar academic ability.	0.9	18.5	12.0	45.4	20.4	2.8	19.4	65.8
#4 Fear of failure makes a student work harder.	0.0	8.4	14.0	50.5	24.3	2.8	8.4	74.8
#5 No student should ever be retained.	0.9	0.0	4.6	45.4	46.3	2.8	0.9	91.7
#6 The youngest children in a grade are more likely candidates for retention than the oldest children in that grade.	7.3	44.0	15.6	22.0	8.3	2.8	51.3	30.3
#8 Retention does not usually help a child above grade 4.	7.3	20.2	20.2	41.3	7.3	3.7	27.5	48.6
#25 Retention relieves stress for a low-achieving student.	2.8	50.0	27.4	12.3	2.8	4.7	52.8	15.1

of the principals wanted to keep the retention option. A much smaller majority indicated their belief in the traditional arguments for retention-encouragement of academic achievement and the easing of stress for weak students. However, in an almost contradictory response, the principals did not agree that retention allows students to master subject matter. Principals rejected the value of threatening retention as well as the use of retention to create classes of similar ability.

In many cases, the principals' responses were spread across the rating scale and included a high proportion of undecided responses. The principals may be aware of the continuing arguments both for and against retention in educational literature. From their administrative vantage point, the principals may also have followed the post-retention progress of many students and viewed a variety of consequences.

Principal Attitudes in the Self-Concept Category

Table 8 shows the principals' responses to statements in the self-concept category of Part A. A large majority of principals disagreed with several other concerns voiced in the literature about the negative effects of retention, the

TABLE 8

PRINCIPAL RESPONSES BY PERCENTAGE IN THE

SELF-CONCEPT CATEGORY OF PART A

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information	Response Summary	
							Agree	Disagree
#7 Retention contributes to later school dropout.	0.9	7.4	20.4	48.1	13.0	10.2	8.3	61.1
#16 Retention is unsuccessful if the child is opposed to it.	2.8	33.0	19.3	38.5	3.7	2.8	35.8	42.2
#20 Retention contributes to the development of behavior problems.	0.9	6.5	25.0	51.9	11.1	4.6	7.4	63.0
#21 Retained students often feel inadequate or inferior.	4.7	42.5	16.0	31.1	3.8	1.9	47.2	34.9
#22 Retained students frequently develop negative attitudes toward school.	3.7	28.0	13.1	47.7	5.6	1.9	31.7	53.3
#23 Retention serves a useful function in helping students adjust to failure.	0.0	11.3	25.5	41.5	14.2	7.5	11.3	55.7
#24 The more times a child is retained the lower will be her/his self-concept.	15.0	48.6	18.7	9.3	3.7	4.7	63.6	13.0
#26 Children who have been retained are rejected by their classmates.	0.0	4.7	12.3	59.4	21.7	1.9	4.7	81.1
#27 Retention allows a child to feel competent as a learner.	0.9	53.7	19.4	17.6	5.6	2.8	54.6	23.2

majority was small and in every case a fair proportion was undecided. These results might indicate that many principals have some reservations about retention either as a result of their reading or their personal experience as administrators. A majority of the principals are convinced that multiple retentions are harmful for the child.

It is interesting to note the high rate of undecided responses by the principals throughout this category. Five of the statements had an undecided response by 19% to 25% of the principals. Certainly a lot of doubt exists about the connection between retention and self-concept. Whether the doubt will be clarified and in which direction are puzzles for the researcher.

Principal Attitudes in the Kindergarten Retention Category

Table 9 shows the principals' responses to statements in the kindergarten retention category of Part A. A majority of the principals support the most frequent explanations given for the use of retention at the kindergarten level. However, in each instance the undecided response ranged from 13% to 18%. The reasons for this indecision are undetermined, although it may be linked to reservations about kindergarten retention.

TABLE 9

PRINCIPAL RESPONSES BY PERCENTAGE IN THE KINDERGARTEN RETENTION CATEGORY OF PART A

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information	Response Summary	
							Agree	Disagree
#28 A second year in kindergarten gives an unready child time to master the skills needed for grade 1.	12.0	63.9	13.0	6.5	1.9	2.8	75.9	8.4
#29 Young children frequently benefit from a second year in kindergarten.	12.0	45.4	18.5	15.7	2.8	5.6	57.4	18.5
#30 Retention is more effective in kindergarten or grade 1 than in the other grades.	22.0	44.0	16.5	13.8	1.8	1.8	66.0	15.6
#31 A second year in kindergarten gives a socially immature child an opportunity to develop appropriate behavior.	17.4	65.1	12.8	1.8	1.8	0.9	82.5	3.6
#32 Retention decisions in kindergarten are strongly influenced by school policy for grades 1 to 6.	4.6	46.8	11.9	24.8	9.2	2.8	51.4	34.0
#33 A parental decision to put a grade 1 aged child in kindergarten is similar, in many ways, to retention.	3.7	35.2	13.9	31.5	10.2	5.6	38.9	41.7

Principal Attitudes in the Retention Process Category

Table 10 shows the principals' responses to statements in the retention process category. Virtually all the principals endorse involvement of the parents in retention decisions. This attitude is shared by the kindergarten teachers and is also strongly recommended in much of the literature on retention. The principals were divided, as were the teachers, in their opinions about including the school board's team of specialists in retention decisions.

Principal Attitudes in the Special Concerns Category

Table 11 gives the principals' responses to statements in the special concerns category of Part A. None of the issues addressed in this category bring exceptionally strong agreement or disagreement from the principals. A majority feel retention might be helpful for the student who has missed a lot of school but not for the student struggling to learn English. Once again, as in the self-concept category, it is interesting to note the high rate of undecided responses to many special concerns issues. Twenty to thirty percent of principals are undecided about the usefulness of retention for ESL students, the learning disabled and the

TABLE 10

PRINCIPAL RESPONSE BY PERCENTAGE IN THE

RETENTION DECISION PROCESS CATEGORY OF PART A

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information	Response Summary	
							Agree	Disagree
#15 All retained students should be referred to the Bureau team for further assessment.	11.2	42.1	9.3	29.0	3.7	4.7	53.3	32.7
#17 Parental support or agreement plays a large role in the success of a retention decision.	66.1	28.4	1.8	1.8	1.8	0.0	94.5	3.6
#18 The decision to retain a child should be made solely by the school.	2.8	1.8	1.8	56.9	36.7	0.0	4.6	93.6
#19 The Bureau team should be involved in every decision.	11.0	29.4	12.8	39.4	5.5	1.8	40.4	44.9

TABLE 11

PRINCIPAL RESPONSE BY PERCENTAGE IN THE SPECIAL CONCERNS CATEGORY OF PART A

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information	Response Summary	
							Agree	Disagree
#9 Retention may be justified for a child who is absent a great deal.	3.7	56.5	11.1	13.9	10.2	4.6	60.2	24.1
#10 A learning disabled child will benefit from retention.	0.0	5.8	31.7	34.6	19.2	8.7	5.8	53.8
#11 Students with poor communication skills in English will learn more English if they are retained.	1.0	20.0	22.9	38.1	15.2	2.9	21.0	53.3
#12 The child who is significantly smaller than others the same age is a more suitable candidate for retention.	0.0	21.1	11.0	46.8	18.3	2.8	21.1	65.1
#13 ESL students should be kept with their age peers.	7.4	50.0	20.4	16.7	3.7	1.9	57.4	20.4
#14 Physically handicapped students should not be retained.	3.8	8.6	29.5	41.0	7.6	9.5	12.4	48.6

physically handicapped. These principals may be reluctant to endorse or reject retention for students with special needs with which they have had limited experience and little training.

Summary of Principals' Responses

In this opinion survey a majority of the elementary school principals concurred with many traditional arguments for the use of retention. At the same time a significant proportion of the principals expressed doubt about these same arguments. A similar pattern emerged in the principals' opinions about the relationship between retention and the child's self-concept. A majority rejected concerns about retention's harmful effects while a significant proportion were undecided or shared these concerns. The principals felt kindergarten retention could help the young child, the academically unready child and the socially immature child; although a significant proportion were undecided.

Comparison Between Teacher Attitudes and Principal Attitudes in Part A

Comparisons between the kindergarten teachers and the principals were completed to determine whether or not there were significant differences between their responses to the

statements in Part A of the questionnaire. The Chi-square statistic was calculated to show the strength of the relationship between the teachers' and principals' responses across the rating scale for each statement. A difference in response between the two groups was considered significant when $p < .05$. Significant differences in response were then grouped into the five categories used earlier to analyze the teachers' and principals' attitudes in Part A. This categorization of the significantly different responses was used in an effort to reveal any pattern in the differing attitudes of the kindergarten teachers and principals. Only one category, retention decision process, did not have any significantly different responses. Tables 12, 13, 14 and 15 present, by category, the group responses for those statements in which a significant difference was found.

Comparison of Attitudes in the Promotion-Retention Controversy Category

In the promotion-retention category of Part A, the responses of the kindergarten teachers and the responses of the principals were significantly different to three of the seven statements (see Table 12).

A majority of both the teacher group and the principal group disagreed with Statement 1 that retention discourages

TABLE 12

COMPARISON OF TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL RESPONSES WHERE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE OCCURRED IN THE PROMOTION-RETENTION CONTROVERSY CATEGORY

Questionnaire Statement	Group Responding	Response Scale (% of respondents)						X^2	DF	P*
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information			
1. Retention discourages learning rather than promotes it.	Teachers	1.6	3.3	15.6	43.4	33.6	2.5	13.54892	5	0.0187
	Principals	4.7	14.0	15.9	41.1	20.6	3.7			
2. Retention allows the child to master subject matter.	Teachers	13.2	62.0	13.2	6.6	2.5	2.5	26.79168	5	0.0001
	Principals	3.8	39.4	29.8	20.2	2.9	3.8			
8. Retention does not usually help a child above grade 4.	Teachers	.8	16.3	29.3	22.0	7.3	24.4	32.63420	5	0.0000
	Principals	7.3	20.2	20.2	41.3	7.3	3.7			

* significant when $p < .05$

learning rather than promotes it. However the percentage of teachers disagreeing was much higher than the percentage of disagreeing principals, and more teachers than principals checked strongly disagree on the opinion scale. In addition, far more principals agreed with Statement 1 than teachers. The principals have not given the same wholehearted support as teachers to a very popular reason for retention.

In response to Statement 2, 30% more teachers than principals agreed that retention allows the child to master subject matter. At the same time, the level of disagreement and indecision was much higher for the principals. The responses reveal that many principals have reservations about the value of retention for promoting subject mastery, while teachers endorse this idea.

The responses to Statement 8 showed that a majority of the kindergarten teachers did not have an opinion on the effectiveness of retention beyond grade 4; large numbers checked undecided or insufficient information. The principals' responses were spread across the rating scale with almost half indicating a belief in the value of retention beyond grade 4. The significant difference noted between teachers and principals appears to be based more on the teachers' lack of opinion

than on different attitudes about the value of retention beyond the primary grades. The teachers probably lack experience beyond division 1 and have not formed an opinion as a result.

However, the significant differences registered for Statements 1 and 2 show a tendency on the part of the principals to be more cautious about the values of retention. The principals' hesitancy about retention is stated much more forcefully by many researchers since, "taken as a whole, the experimental data collected over the past 70 years fail to indicate any significant benefits of grade retention for the majority of students with academic ... problems" (Rose and others, p. 206).

Comparison of Attitudes in the Self-Concept Category

In the self-concept category of Part A, the responses of the kindergarten teachers and the responses of the principals were significantly different to six of the nine statements (see Table 13). A significant difference in response to 66% of the self-concept statements made this category the area of greatest disparity between teachers and principals. The responses will be reviewed briefly and then the disparity in attitude for the entire category will be discussed.

TABLE 13

COMPARISON OF TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL RESPONSES WHERE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE OCCURRED IN THE SELF-CONCEPT CATEGORY

Questionnaire Statement	Group Responding	Response Scale (% of respondents)						X^2	DF	P*
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information			
7. Retention contributes to later school dropout.	Teachers	0.0	2.4	13.8	43.1	18.7	22.0	11.92555	5	0.0358
	Principals	0.9	7.4	20.4	48.1	13.0	10.2			
16. Retention is unsuccessful if the child is opposed to it.	Teachers	6.6	29.5	23.0	31.1	0.0	9.8	12.17969	5	0.0324
	Principals	2.8	33.0	19.3	38.5	3.7	2.8			
20. Retention contributes to the development of behavior problems.	Teachers	0.8	3.3	9.1	66.9	14.9	5.0	12.71095	5	0.0262
	Principals	0.9	6.5	25.0	51.9	11.1	4.6			
21. Retained students often feel inadequate or inferior.	Teachers	1.6	22.1	11.5	54.1	5.7	4.9	18.86430	5	0.0020
	Principals	4.7	42.5	16.0	31.1	3.8	1.9			
22. Retained students frequently develop negative attitudes toward school.	Teachers	1.7	17.5	6.7	56.7	8.3	9.2	12.84824	5	0.0248
	Principals	3.7	28.0	13.1	47.7	5.6	1.9			
27. Retention allows a child to feel competent as a learner.	Teachers	16.9	62.7	9.3	6.8	0.8	3.4	30.06702	5	0.0000
	Principals	.9	53.7	19.4	17.6	5.6	2.8			

* significant when $p < .05$

A majority of both teachers and principals disagreed with Statement 7 that retention contributes to later school dropout. However, more principals than teachers agreed with the statement.

About 36% of both teachers and principals agreed with Statement 16 that retention is unsuccessful if the child is opposed to it. Slightly more principals than teachers disagreed with the statement.

A majority of both teachers and principals disagreed with Statement 20 that retention contributes to behavior problems. However, the teacher majority was much larger than the principal majority. More principals than teachers agreed and a large percentage of principals were undecided.

A majority of the teachers disagreed with Statement 21 that retained students often feel inadequate or inferior while only 35% of the principals disagreed. Almost a majority of the principals agreed with Statement 21.

In response to Statement 22, more principals than teachers agreed that retained students develop negative attitudes toward school. Similarly more teachers than principals disagreed with the statement.

The greatest difference in attitude between the two groups came in their responses to Statement 27 that retention allows a child to feel competent as a learner. Twenty-five percent more teachers than principals were in agreement, while considerably more principals disagreed. Almost 20% of the principals were undecided.

The responses to Statements 7, 20, 21, 22 and 27 showed that more principals than teachers believe retention may harm a child's self-esteem and damage the retained child's attitude toward school. Although this is not a majority view of the principals, the significant differences between the two groups show that the principals tend to be more aware of the potential negative impact of a failure experience. The principals appear to be more informed about the debate that has gone on in educational research concerning the value of retention. Certainly harmful consequences to the child's self-concept have been frequently given as valid reasons not to retain (Bocks, 1977; Koons, 1977; Reinherz and Griffen, 1970).

Comparison of Attitudes in the Kindergarten Retention Category

In the kindergarten retention category of Part A, the responses of the kindergarten teachers and the principals

were significantly different to three of the six statements (see Table 14). These questionnaire statements represent three very frequently given reasons for the use of retention at the kindergarten level. The difference in response occurred at a highly significant level in all three cases ($p < .01$).

An overwhelming majority of the teachers agreed with Statement 28 that a second year in kindergarten gives an unready child time to master the skills needed for grade 1. Almost 49% of the teachers were in strong agreement with this reason for kindergarten retention. While 75% of the principals also agreed, another 13% were undecided and 8% disagreed.

Similarly a large majority of the teachers agreed with Statement 29 that young children frequently benefit from a second year in kindergarten and very few disagreed. A much smaller majority of the principals agreed with this reason for kindergarten retention, while 18% disagreed and the same amount were undecided.

Almost 94% of the teachers agreed that a second year in kindergarten gives a socially immature child an opportunity to develop appropriate behavior. Once again a smaller majority of the principals agreed.

TABLE 14

COMPARISON OF TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL RESPONSES WHERE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE OCCURRED IN THE KINDERGARTEN RETENTION CATEGORY

Questionnaire Statement	Group Responding	Response Scale (% of respondents)						χ^2	DF	P*
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information			
28. A second year in kindergarten gives an unready child time to master the skills needed for grade 1.	Teachers	48.8	47.1	2.5	1.7	0.0	0.0	44.83367	5	0.0000
	Principals	12.0	63.9	13.0	6.5	1.9	2.8			
29. Young children frequently benefit from a second year in kindergarten.	Teachers	33.1	44.6	12.4	5.8	0.8	3.3	19.60356	5	0.0015
	Principals	12.0	45.4	18.5	15.7	2.8	5.6			
31. A second year in kindergarten gives a socially immature child an opportunity to develop appropriate behavior.	Teachers	40.3	53.2	4.8	1.6	0.0	0.0	19.42485	5	0.0016
	Principals	17.4	65.1	12.8	1.8	1.8	0.9			

* significant when $p < .05$

Although a majority of the kindergarten teachers and principals in this survey supported the three most common reasons for kindergarten retention, the teachers' support was almost unanimous while the principals' support was tempered by some disagreement and indecision about each reason. The principals' tendency toward cautious use of retention at all levels is evident in the significant differences in this category. The hesitancy to endorse kindergarten retention may be wise "since little is known about the effects of such a policy (kindergarten retention) on children, caution should be observed in its prescription to meet all problems" (Skuba, 1979, p. 138).

Comparison of Attitudes in the Special Concerns Category

In the special concerns category of Part A, the responses of the kindergarten teachers and the principals were significantly different to two of the six statements (see Table 15). More principals than teachers felt that ESL students should be kept with their age peers, a concept that was suggested in Light's Retention Guideline. In response to Statement 14 that physically handicapped students should not be retained, almost 30% of the principals were undecided and

TABLE 15

COMPARISON OF TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL RESPONSES
WHERE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE OCCURRED IN THE
SPECIAL CONCERNS CATEGORY

Questionnaire Statement	Group Responding	Response Scale (% of respondents)						X^2	DF	P*
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Insufficient Information			
13. ESL (English as a second language) students should be kept with their age peers.	Teachers	5.7	44.3	18.0	18.0	0.8	13.1	12.34913	5	0.0303
	Principals	7.4	50.0	20.4	16.7	3.7	1.9			
14. Physically handicapped students should not be retained.	Teachers	2.5	11.7	17.5	45.0	1.7	21.7	14.17441	5	0.0145
	Principals	3.8	8.6	29.5	41.0	7.6	9.5			

* significant when $p < .05$

fewer principals than teachers agreed. There are no patterns that emerge in the comparison of attitudes in this category. Although the issues in this category are important when they arise in individual cases, they do not occur frequently for teachers and principals.

Summary of Attitude Comparison

The responses of the kindergarten teachers and the principals were significantly different to fourteen of the thirty-three statements in Part A of the questionnaire. For nine statements the difference was at a high level of significance. Even though in many cases a majority of the principals held the same opinion as the teachers, these significant differences reveal a pattern of different attitudes. As a group, the principals were more aware of problems and possible harmful effects associated with the retention experience. The principals were more cautious about the benefits of retention and the value of kindergarten retention.

QUESTIONNAIRE PART B

Part B of the questionnaire was designed to gather

information about the respondents' teaching background and their personal experiences with kindergarten retention recommendations. Another objective of the study, examination of preferred alternatives to kindergarten retention, was included in Part B of the questionnaire (see Appendix 2).

Background Information on Questionnaire Respondents

The teacher respondents to the survey were questionned about their teaching experience, their kindergarten experience and their age. The mean of their teaching experience was 8.9 years with a range from 1 to 30 years. The mean of their kindergarten teaching experience was 5.3 years with a range from zero to 16 years. Two of the 125 teachers did not answer the question about age. Of the remaining 123 teachers, 32 were in the 20-29 years range, 56 were in the 30-39 range, 25 were in the 40-49 range, and 10 were 50 and over.

The principal respondents were questionned about their years of administrative experience and the levels of their teaching experience. Only one principal did not answer these questions. The mean of their administrative experience was 11.2 years with a range from 1 to 26 years. Table 16

summarizes the different levels of teaching experience for this group of elementary school principals. Most of the principals had teaching experience at several levels. A majority, 82.3 percent, had taught in division 2 (grades 4 to 6). A smaller majority, 66.9 percent, had taught in division 1 (grades 1 to 3). Only a small number, 18.5 percent, had taught kindergarten. The lack of kindergarten experience may be partly due to the relatively recent addition of kindergarten to the Edmonton Public Schools.

TABLE 16

TEACHING EXPERIENCE OF PRINCIPAL RESPONDENTS

Grade Level	N*	%
Kindergarten	23	18.5
Division 1 (1-3)	83	66.9
Division 2 (4-6)	102	82.3
Division 3 (7-9)	58	46.7
Division 4 (10-12)	26	20.9

*108 principals answered this question

Retention Recommendation Process for Kindergarten Teachers

One important purpose of the research study was to examine the retention decisions of kindergarten teachers. A series of open-ended questions in Part B of the questionnaire asked the teachers about the frequency of their retention recommendations, the factors they consider when deciding whether or not to recommend retention, and the people teachers consult during the retention process.

Frequency of Retention Recommendations

The frequency of retention recommendations made by the kindergarten teachers has been summarized in Table 17. Only four teachers, 3.2 percent of the total group, have never recommended retention for a kindergarten child. The most common frequency of retention recommendations for this group of teachers was "1 to 3 times".

TABLE 17

FREQUENCY OF RETENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

BY KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

	Retention Recommendations			
K. Teachers	None	1-3	4-6	7 or more
N	4	59	37	25
%	3.2	47.2	29.6	20

It seems logical to assume that the number of retention recommendations a teacher has made will rise as the teacher's years of kindergarten experience increase. Table 18 compares the kindergarten experience of teachers at each frequency of retention recommendation from "NEVER" to "7 or more times". The rising means, medians, and modes from the NEVER level to the "4 to 6 times" level do show a tendency to keep on using retention through a teaching career in the kindergarten. However, the amount of kindergarten experience levels off in the "7 or more times" level of retention recommendation. It is also interesting to note a large number of kindergarten teachers who use retention infrequently. In the "1-3 times" level of recommendation, eighteen teachers had been teaching in kindergarten from six to thirteen years. In the "4-6 times" level of recommendation, twenty respondents had been teaching in kindergarten from six to sixteen years. These teachers had recommended retention at a rate of once, or considerably less than once, a year.

Although some kindergarten teachers may use retention on an infrequent basis, virtually all the respondents had recommended retention at least once. Three of the four teachers who indicated they had never made a retention recommendation

were in their first year in the kindergarten and had not yet faced such a decision. Only one teacher who had completed at least one full kindergarten year had never recommended retention.

TABLE 18

COMPARISON OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND FREQUENCY OF RETENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

	Kindergarten Teaching Experience		
Number of Kindergarten Retention Recommendations	Range of Experience	Mean of Experience	Mode of Experience
None	0-2 years	.5 years	0 years
1-3	1-13	4.4	2
4-6	1-16	6.6	4
7+	2-11	6.6	6

Teachers who had recommended retention were asked to tell how satisfied they were with the retention decisions. Almost all the teachers said they were "very satisfied" and that the second year in kindergarten had been a "positive experience" for the child. The few teachers who expressed dissatisfaction with their decisions or who had doubts about the

value of the second kindergarten year for the child were experienced kindergarten teachers. These second thoughts came from teachers with 4, 8, 9, 10 and 11 years of kindergarten teaching. More experience may bring a re-evaluation of retention and an increased desire for alternatives.

Factors Considered in Retention Recommendations

The teachers were asked to list all the factors they consider when deciding whether or not to recommend retention for a kindergarten child. Most teachers responded with a list of several items or a descriptive paragraph. All the factors mentioned in their responses have been categorized; a summary appears in Table 19.

Eighty percent of the teachers identified specific intellectual skills or mentioned cognitive development generally. Eighty percent also mentioned social maturity as a factor to be considered in retention recommendations. The next most frequently named factor was emotional maturity. All other factors were listed by less than 50% of the teachers.

The strong concern with cognitive development in kindergarten is not unexpected since unsatisfactory academic achievement is the usual reason given for the use of retention

at any grade level. The teachers who mentioned this factor most likely feel a second kindergarten year would provide time to master the intellectual skills needed for grade one work. Most research studies show retention does not ensure a higher level academic achievement in subsequent school years.

The range of factors mentioned reveals a concern for all areas of the young child's development and also an awareness of the effect the child's family has on school success. Almost half the teachers listed age as a factor they took into account when considering retention. A belief in the connection of school entry age and school success was also discovered in the opinion survey conducted among primary teachers by Brunanski (1982) and has been the focus of other Alberta studies (Pain, 1981; Koep, 1982).

It is interesting to note the relatively low number of references to the child's self-concept in the responses. Only 19 teachers listed self-concept as a factor they considered in retention decisions, even though there is a large body of research which suggests retention may be harmful to the child's self-esteem and relationships with his classmates.

A large number of miscellaneous factors were grouped

TABLE 19

FACTORS CONSIDERED IN KINDERGARTEN

RETENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Factors	Teachers Responding	
	N	%
Cognitive Development	100	80
Social Maturity	100	80
Emotional Maturity	88	74.4
Physical Development (Fine Motor)	57	45.6
Age	56	44.8
Home Background	39	31.2
Independence	25	20
Language	22	17.6
Self Concept	19	15.2
General Background Knowledge	13	10.4
Other Factors	50	40

in the "other" category. Included here were "parental reaction", "the class situation next year", "the principal's advice", "test results", "attendance", "health", and "recommendation of the Bureau".

When teachers were asked to identify one factor as the most important in retention decisions, the order of factors changed (see Table 20). Emotional maturity was ranked first, slightly ahead of social maturity. Many teachers had named these two factors as a dual most important. Cognitive development, although mentioned by 80% of the teachers as a retention factor, was only ranked fourth as a most important factor. Nineteen percent could not identify just one factor and stressed, instead, the importance of all the factors they had listed.

TABLE 20

THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR

IN KINDERGARTEN RETENTION

Factor	Rank	% Teachers
Emotional maturity	1	38.4
Social maturity	2	36.0
All factors	3	19.2
Cognitive development	4	18.4
Age	5	5.6
Self-concept	6	4.0
Independence	7	3.2

Consultation in Retention Recommendations

The teachers were asked to list all the people whom they consulted while deciding whether or not to retain a child. Their responses are summarized in Table 21. Most teachers named several people with parents, principals and the Bureau team being mentioned by a majority of the respondents.

TABLE 21

CONSULTATION BY KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN RETENTION DECISIONS

Person(s) Consulted	Rank	% Naming Person
Parents	1	96.0
Principal	2	89.6
Bureau team	3	67.2
School Counsellor	4	38.4
Grade 1 teacher	5	23.2
School Nurse	6	18.4
Other K. teachers	7	13.6
Child	8	12.8
E.C.S. Consultant	9	7.2
Classroom aide	10	6.4
Doctor	11	4.0

Alternatives to Retention

In Part B of the questionnaire both the kindergarten teachers and the principals were asked if they would prefer alternatives to retention for kindergarten children. The respondents were also asked to explain the alternatives which they would like to use.

A majority of both the principals, 72.5 percent, and of the teachers, 79.2 percent, indicated that they desired alternatives to kindergarten retention (see Table 22). A small number, 13.7 percent of the principals and 14.4 percent of the teachers, did not wish for a retention alternative. A few principals, 4.6 percent, indicated that they believed alternatives were already available even though YES and NO were the only response options included on the questionnaire. Some respondents, 6.4 percent of the teachers and 9.2 percent of the principals, did not answer the question. The large majority of respondents wishing for options to kindergarten retention suggests a dissatisfaction with retention that did not emerge in responses to Part A of the questionnaire.

TABLE 22

PREFERENCE BY % FOR RETENTION ALTERNATIVES

Group Responding	Yes	No	No Answer	Alternatives Already Available
Teachers	79.2	14.4	6.4	0.0
Principals	72.5	13.7	9.2	4.6

Those respondents who indicated a preference for alternatives to kindergarten retention were asked to explain the alternatives which they would like to use. From the choices described on the questionnaires, seven categories were created as follows: (1) continuous progress, (2) readiness class, (3) kindergarten-grade 1 combination, (4) entry age, (5) two levels of kindergarten, (6) other or miscellaneous suggestions, and (7) no suggested alternatives. The alternatives described on the questionnaire have been summarized in Table 23.

Continuous progress was the category of alternative most frequently mentioned by the principals. Only eight

TABLE 23

KINDERGARTEN RETENTION ALTERNATIVES SUGGESTED BY TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

Group Responding*	Alternatives																			
	Continuous Progress			Readiness Class			K-1 Combination			Entry Age			2 Levels of K			Other		No Alternative	
	N	%**	Rank	N	%	Rank	N	%	Rank	N	%	Rank	N	%	Rank	N	%	N	%
Teachers	8	8.0	4	37	37.4	1	21	21.2	2	17	17.2	3	6	6.1	5	15	15.2	0	0.0
Principals	22	27.8	1	17	21.5	3	18	22.8	2	7	8.9	4	3	3.8	5	6	7.6	9	11.4

* Teachers and principals who said they would prefer alternatives to K retention.
** Total % exceeds 100 due to multiple suggestions.

teachers described alternatives which could be grouped in the continuous progress category making it the fourth ranked choice of the kindergarten teachers. In this category, descriptions often referred to a "non-graded primary school" or "a more flexible system where children could progress at their own rate". Many suggestions stressed the importance of providing "a better opportunity for the child to pick up where he left off" without "repeating identical experiences". Several principals referred to Individual Educational Plans as a means of "tailoring a program to the needs of a pupil regardless of class placement". A few teachers referred to the necessity of extending the early childhood philosophy beyond kindergarten when they mentioned a continuous progress alternative. Continuous progress was an option recommended in the literature related to school entry age as a valuable method to counteract the problems encountered by young entrants. Continuous progress also appeared in the literature as an alternative which might avoid the negative effects of retention.

Readiness class was the category of alternative most frequently mentioned by the kindergarten teachers while

it was the third choice of the principals. This alternative was described as a "half way step" or "stepping stone" or "intermediate step" between kindergarten and grade 1. Respondents suggesting this alternative viewed it as an additional primary year to be followed by a year in a regular grade 1. Many descriptions suggested a readiness class would offer "more emphasis on pre-reading skills" and "more challenging opportunities" than kindergarten retention. In making the readiness class their most popular choice, the kindergarten teachers are suggesting a traditional, rather than an innovative alternative to retention.

Kindergarten-grade 1 combination was the second ranked choice of both teachers and principals. This alternative was usually described as a "joint placement" in kindergarten and grade 1 in the same school. Frequently the child's school day is split between a morning kindergarten class and an afternoon with a grade 1 class. Many respondents felt this alternative worked well when the child was present at the grade 1 level art, music, science and social studies but not for grade 1 reading and mathematics. The kindergarten-grade 1 combination was considered a transition year before entry into

a regular grade 1. This alternative to kindergarten retention requires few, if any, administrative adjustments that are so common with a readiness class or continuous progress. Many respondents mentioned that this retention alternative was already being used in their schools.

Entry age was the alternative category that was the third most popular choice with the teachers. Entry age alternatives were a distant fourth choice with the principals, having been mentioned by only 8.9 percent of the principals. Most of the suggestions in this category showed a strong concern that all children should be "ready for school". Many respondents felt such readiness could be achieved by establishing an older entry age; "five years old by December 31st" and "five years old to begin kindergarten" were two entry ages frequently proposed. The other solution suggested, either alone or in conjunction with a changed entry age, was screening school beginners for readiness. "Early screening in kindergarten and an opportunity to recommend the child remain at home for a year" or "a readiness test" or "screening before they come" were typical examples of this alternative. In the entry age category there appeared to be an underlying

assumption that school readiness could be achieved by delaying school entrance.

The last specific category of alternatives is two levels of kindergarten which was the fifth ranked choice of both principals and teachers. Although all suggestions in this category included "two kindergarten years with distinctive differences between the two years", the nature or use of the two levels varied. Three respondents requested "four year old kindergartens", while three more asked for "Junior and Senior kindergartens" without indicating age groups. These respondents may be envisioning a two year program for kindergarten similar to ones already in operation in some of the other provinces. Some descriptions divided the kindergarten levels by ability rather than age; "one for children who already know numbers, letters, shapes and are mature, i.e. independent workers who display self-initiative".

Twenty-one of the alternative ideas could not be included in any of the categories already discussed and have been grouped together in the other category. These miscellaneous suggestions included "more E.C.S. like classes in Division I", "low enrolment grade 1 classes", "family or

vertical grouping", "parenting courses for parents of pre-schoolers", and "extended grade 1". In addition, nine of the principals who had indicated a preference for alternatives to kindergarten retention did not suggest any retention options. Their lack of suggestion was categorized as no alternative. These blank spaces on the questionnaire might be the result of a hurried reply. However a few principals included an almost plaintive plea in comments such as "ideas please!" and "need options".

The retention alternatives recommended in the questionnaire responses represent a wide range in educational philosophy. Continuous progress ideas, the first choice of the principals, are usually linked to a view of education that is child-centred and emphasizes individualized instruction. The readiness class option, the first choice of 37.4 percent of the teachers, is a more traditional idea that may or may not allow the child to progress at an individual rate. The joint placement in kindergarten and grade 1 is basically a practical suggestion that requires no adjustments of classes or curriculum.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was 1) to report in detail the opinion trends of kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals concerning retention and 2) to determine if there were any statistically significant differences between the attitudes toward retention of these two groups of educators. The questionnaire statements, used to determine attitude, were divided into five categories of interest to the study.

The chapter also reported the experiences with kindergarten retention recommendations of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire. In addition, the desired alternatives to kindergarten retention and teachers and principals were categorized and compared.

Chapter V will present a summary of the results obtained in this study. A discussion of the implications of the findings will lead to suggestions for educators and researchers.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on kindergarten retention and the attitudes of educators toward retention. This chapter will present a brief review of the study, a discussion of the research findings, and conclusions drawn from those findings. Implications for educators and suggestions for further research will be included.

SUMMARY

Purpose of the Study

One main purpose of the research study was to first identify attitudes and then compare attitudes toward retention of kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals in Edmonton Public Schools. Another purpose of the study was to discover the personal experiences of the surveyed teachers with kindergarten retention recommendations. In addition, the study set out to assess the feelings of

teachers and principals about alternatives to retention at the kindergarten level. A questionnaire was used to survey the population of teachers and principals and gather the information sought in the study.

Review of the Findings

The attitude survey of the kindergarten teachers revealed a high level of acceptance of many traditional arguments for the use of retention. A majority of the teachers believed retention encourages learning, allows retained children to master subject matter, and eases anxiety for struggling students. The teachers almost unanimously supported kindergarten retention for the very young child, the academically unready child, and the socially immature child. The teachers had few reservations about the potential harm that retention might have on a child's self-concept and successful interaction with classmates. However, the teachers did feel multiple retentions and the child's opposition to retention should be avoided.

The attitude survey of the principals showed that, in many instances, a majority of the principals responded in

a manner similar to the teachers. However, the responses of the principals and the teachers were significantly different ($p < .05$) to 14 of the 33 statements in Part A. The principals tended to be more cautious about the benefits of retention in kindergarten and the other grades. The principals were less convinced than the teachers that retention actually promoted learning and encouraged mastery of subject matter. Although a majority of the principals supported kindergarten retention for very young, socially immature or academically weak children, the majority was significantly smaller than that of the teachers and always tempered by doubt. The principals more often recognized the possibility that retention could harm the child.

Almost all the teachers had recommended kindergarten retention at least once, and few expressed dissatisfaction with the results of these decisions. The teachers considered many factors when they were contemplating retention for a child, with cognitive development and social maturity being mentioned by 80% of the respondents. However, they ranked social and emotional maturity as the most important factor to consider while cognitive development was ranked fourth.

Self-concept was listed as a factor to consider by 15.2% of the teachers, while only 4% ranked it the most important factor. The teachers consulted many people while making a retention decision with parents heading the list.

A majority of both the principals, 72.5%, and of the teachers, 79.2%, desired alternatives to kindergarten retention. The strong wish for options expressed by the teachers seems to be in contrast to their equally strong endorsement of retention in the first part of the questionnaire. The principals' most frequently mentioned alternative was continuous progress for the child, while the teachers most often cited the creation of a readiness class between kindergarten and grade 1 as a desirable alternative.

CONCLUSIONS

This research study suggests that the kindergarten teachers surveyed were unaware of, or at least uninfluenced by, the immense amount of research about grade retention. The only conclusion that can be drawn from a review of the literature is that retention is not a more valuable method than

promotion for improving the academic performance of the weak student (Jackson, 1975; Plummer, 1984; and Lebaree, 1984). Despite lack of evidence to validate the traditional rationales for retention and suggestions in the research that retention may harm the child's self-esteem, teachers continue to employ retention and to wholeheartedly endorse its use as a remedy for many problems seen in kindergarten children.

The researcher can only conclude that retention decisions in kindergarten, and possibly in other grades, are being made on the basis of traditional practice. Retention decisions appear to be influenced more by what has always happened than by an evaluation of what is best for the child.

At the same time it should be noted that educators, as well as parents and the general public, are concerned about the publicity currently being given to illiteracy among high school graduates and fears about declining academic standards. The growing demand for more testing, merit promotion, and increased emphasis on the "basics" influence the expectations set for the elementary school. Kindergarten teachers undoubtedly feel some pressure from the back-to-the basics movement as well.

The principals contacted in this survey appeared to have some understanding of both sides of the retention-promotion controversy. The principals were more aware than the teachers of retention's possible flaws and were less likely to see retention as a cure-all for children's problems. Many factors may have contributed to the principals' opinions on retention. Their experience as administrators may have provided the principals with an opportunity to watch the varied progress of many retainees, including some for whom retention was not a successful option. The principals may have a higher level of education or more opportunities to delve into educational research.

Whatever the reasons for these attitudes of the principals, the kindergarten teachers would benefit from an opportunity to share their principals' experience and opinions. Often kindergarten teachers, aware of the demands the grade 1 curriculum will place on immature, academically weak children, suggest retention without considering its long range implications for the children.

While the research study showed a strong bias in favour of retention and its traditional uses, the study also

revealed an equally strong desire for alternatives to retention in kindergarten. The need to consider a wide range of alternatives to retention was mentioned frequently in the literature on retention. Perhaps the question educators should consider is not whether or not to retain a child but rather what is the most favourable learning situation for the child.

The results of the study emphasize the need to re-evaluate the use of retention at the kindergarten level and also to begin a search for alternatives. Retention is only one possibility for the child who experiences difficulties in kindergarten, or the other grades. Individualized instruction and non-graded programs were mentioned frequently in the retention literature (Bocks, 1977; Bossing and Brien, 1980) as alternatives that could overcome the weaknesses associated with retention. Retention alternatives should stress the individuality of the child, variety in learning styles, and the importance of the child rather than the structure of the curriculum and the organization of the school. Once again, this study found the alternatives suggested by the principals tended to show more awareness of the child's

individual needs. The principals' top ranked alternative was continuous progress, an option that emphasizes appropriate instruction rather than repetition or retention.

There is no easy solution to the problems encountered by children in school. Certainly retention, despite its long standing and widespread use in our schools, has not been proven to be a successful policy for struggling students. Retention must be re-evaluated and viewed as only one option out of many that should be available in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Several aspects of the data analysis completed for this study have implications for kindergarten teachers and principals who are currently using or considering kindergarten retention. Recommendations are made to address the inconsistencies that exist between current practice and research evidence, as well as inconsistencies between teachers' attitudes toward retention and their expressed desire for retention alternatives.

1. It is recommended that kindergarten teachers develop

more awareness of the literature on retention which fails to validate many of the claims made for using retention. Teachers need to become more aware of the possible negative effects of retention on children. This knowledge could be gained through:

i) appropriate speakers at teachers' meetings and in-service programs designed to acquaint teachers with research on retention.

ii) consultation with school principals who appear to be more knowledgeable about arguments on both sides of the retention controversy.

2. The search for retention alternatives should be undertaken in earnest. Although "many alternatives have been proposed in the literature, ... well-meaning teachers continue to employ retention with the support of parents and school administrators" (Plummer, 1984, p. 42). A starting point for this exploration could be the alternatives suggested by the respondents in this study. Although the implementation of alternatives to kindergarten retention takes place in schools, the impetus to investigate and employ other options for weak students needs

to come from the administrators of the whole school system. Changes, however minor, to such a traditional concept as retention require support from every level of the educational system.

3. Review of retention policies and practice should be undertaken periodically by school systems. Retention has been a traditional solution suggested for the school difficulties of many children for a long time. Now educators must assess the appropriateness of retention and be prepared to adapt existing practice. This review of retention within a school system might aim to produce:

    i) guidelines to assist teachers in choosing the most appropriate option for a child who is encountering problems at school.

    ii) guidelines to make retention a successful experience once this option has been chosen for a child (Bossing and Brien, 1980).

    iii) active parent involvement in every retention decision, and in the child's school experiences during the retained year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study of kindergarten retention practices and

of attitudes toward kindergarten retention represents a small beginning to research on kindergarten retention. From the study, suggestions emerge for further research in three general areas.

1. Replication of the Study

Further research should be undertaken to replicate this survey of attitudes and practices in other school districts and at other grade levels. The conclusions and suggestions for educators made in this study might need to be adjusted if it is found that attitudes and retention practices are quite different when a much wider population is surveyed.

2. Alternatives to Kindergarten Retention

Further research is also needed to investigate alternatives to kindergarten retention. Research could determine if the suggested alternatives work as well as, or better than, retention for young children. Possibly research could also determine whether the potential hazards to self-concept, school behavior and peer interaction that have been associated with retention (Goodlad, 1954; Godfrey, 1971; Plummer, 1984) are also linked to

retention alternatives. Several distinct types of retention alternatives were suggested by respondents: continuous progress, a readiness class, a combination of kindergarten and grade 1, and two levels of kindergarten. Research could be developed to assess the merit of each type of alternative.

3. Examination of Retention

Further research is needed to investigate the effects of kindergarten retention on the child. Either ethnographic or case study techniques could be used to ascertain the classroom experiences of the retained child during a second kindergarten year and subsequent school years. Research might focus on the retained child's feelings, the child's interaction with classmates and with the teacher. Research might also compare the experiences of borderline students who are selected for promotion and retention in kindergarten. Longitudinal research might determine the long range effects of retention by following retained students from kindergarten to high school graduation.

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SCHOOL ---
POSITION -
I. D. -

APPENDIX 1

RETENTION QUESTIONNAIRE

* * * *

Retention is the practice of having a child spend two consecutive years in the same grade.

PART A

Please circle the response which best describes your opinion about each of the following statements.

1 = STRONGLY AGREE

2 = AGREE

3 = UNDECIDED

4 = DISAGREE

5 = STRONGLY DISAGREE

NA = YOU FEEL YOU HAVE INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION ABOUT THE STATEMENT TO COMMENT

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE		FOR OFFIC USE ONLY
1. Retention discourages learning rather than promotes it.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	6
2. Retention allows the child to master subject matter.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	7
3. Retention helps to create classes of similar academic ability.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	8

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE		FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
4. Fear of possible failure makes a student work harder.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	9
5. No student should ever be retained.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	10
6. The youngest children in a grade are more likely candidates for retention than the oldest children in that grade.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	11
7. Retention contributes to later school dropout.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	12
8. Retention does not usually help a child above grade 4.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	13
9. Retention may be justified for a child who is absent a great deal.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	14
10. A learning disabled child will benefit from retention.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	15
11. Students with poor communication skills in English will learn more English if they are retained.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	16
12. The child who is significantly smaller than others the same age is a more suitable candidate for retention.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	17

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE		FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
13. ESL (English as a second language) students should be kept with their age peers.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	18
14. Physically handicapped students should not be retained.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	19
15. All retained students should be referred to the Bureau team (specialists in reading, speech, psychology and social work) for further assessment.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	20
16. Retention is unsuccessful if the child is opposed to it.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	21
17. Parental support agreement plays a large role in the success of a retention decision.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	22
18. The decision to retain a child should be made solely by the school.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	23
19. The Bureau team (specialists in reading, speech, psychology and social work) should be involved in every retention decision.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	24
20. Retention contributes to the development of behavior problems.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	25

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE		FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
21. Retained students often feel inadequate or inferior.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	26
22. Retained students frequently develop negative attitude toward school.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	27
23. Retention serves a useful function in helping students adjust to failure.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	28
24. The more times a child is retained the lower will be her/his self-concept.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	29
25. Retention relieves stress for a low-achieving student.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	30
26. Children who have been retained are rejected by their classmates.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	31
27. Retention allows a child to feel competent as a learner.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	32
28. A second year in kindergarten gives an unready child time to master the skills needed for grade 1.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	33
29. Young children frequently benefit from a second year in kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	34

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE		FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
30. Retention is more effective in kindergarten or grade 1 than in the other grades.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	35
31. A second year in kindergarten gives a socially immature child an opportunity to develop appropriate behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	36
32. Retention decisions in kindergarten are strongly influenced by school policy for grades 1 to 6.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	37
33. A parental decision to put a grade 1 aged child in kindergarten is similar, in many ways, to retention.	1	2	3	4	5	NA	38

* * * *

PART B - PRINCIPALS

1. Check the levels at which you have teaching experience:

45,46,47

48

Kindergarten _____
Division 1 _____
Division 2 _____
Division 3 _____
Division 4 _____

2. The number of years administrative experience I have is _____. 49

3. A. Is there a retention policy for kindergarten in your school?

YES _____
NO _____

B. If you answered YES in 3A, please explain the retention policy.

_____

_____

_____

C. Does your kindergarten retention policy differ from the policy for the other grades? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

4. A. Would you prefer alternatives to retention for kindergarten children?

YES _____
NO _____

B. If you answered YES in 4A, please explain the alternatives that you would like to use. _____

_____

_____

_____

5. Please add any other comments that you have about retention in kindergarten or any grade level. _____

_____

_____

_____

* * * *

PART B - TEACHERS

1. The number of years I have taught kindergarten is _____. 39,40

2. The number of years teaching experience I have is _____. 41,42

3. My age: 20 - 29 _____ 43
30 - 39 _____
40 - 49 _____
50 and over _____.

4. A. I have recommended that a child be retained in kindergarten (please check one): 44

NEVER _____
1-3 Times _____
4-6 Times _____
7 or more _____.

B. If you checked NEVER in part A, please explain why you have never made a retention recommendation.

_____
_____
_____
_____

C. If you have recommended retention in kindergarten, please tell how satisfied you were with the retention decisions. _____
_____
_____
_____

5. A. List all the factors you consider when deciding whether or not to recommend retention. _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

B. Which factor do you consider the most important of those listed in 5 A? _____

_____

6. A. List all the people you consult when you are considering retention for a kindergarten child.

_____

_____

_____

_____

B. Which person do you consider the most important of those listed in 6 A? _____

_____

7. A. Would you prefer alternatives to retention for kindergarten children? YES _____

NO _____.

B. If you answered YES in 7 A, please explain the alternatives that you would like to use.

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. A. Is there a retention policy for kindergarten in your school? YES _____

NO _____.

B. If you answered YES in 8 A, please explain the retention policy. _____

_____

_____

_____

9. Please add any comments that you wish to add about retention in kindergarten or any grade level. _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX 3

K I N D E R G A R T E N

R E T E N T I O N

S U R V E Y

April 15, 1985.

Dear

As part of the requirements for the Master of Education degree at the University of Alberta, I am conducting a survey on kindergarten retention. The problems of kindergarten children and the solutions available to their teachers have always been one of my interests while I have been teaching kindergarten in the Edmonton Public Schools.

I hope you will help my research by sharing your feelings and ideas about retention. Please take a few minutes now to complete the attached questionnaire. An envelope is included for easy return on the school truck. When the study is completed, I will share the results with all respondents.

As you will notice, the questionnaires have a number code. This code will enable me to contact teachers in order to get an adequate return and will not affect the confidentiality of your responses in any way. At no time will teachers or schools be identified in the study.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss the issue at more length, please phone me. Thanks so much for your help.

Sincerely,

Susan Bell.
476-5675 (Kildare School)
474-7016 (home)